

University of Warwick institutional repository: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick**

<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/1993>

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it. Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

**‘We can but spell a surface history’:  
The Biblical Typology of Christina  
Rossetti**

**By**

**Elizabeth Ludlow**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in English

University of Warwick  
Department of English and Comparative Literary  
Studies  
October 2008

## **Acknowledgments**

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Emma Francis, for the support and guidance that she has given me throughout this project. I would also like to thank Zoë Brigley for her invaluable friendship which has helped make my time at Warwick enjoyable. My thanks also to Thomas Docherty, John Holmes, Margaret Flett, Emma Mason, Rhian Williams, and Madeleine Wood for the interest they have taken in my work and for the comments and suggestions that they have made.

My research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. I would also like to acknowledge the help of the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. My thanks also to St. Deiniol's Library for an invaluable two week residential scholarship, to the British Association of Victorian Studies for two conference related bursaries, and to those at the 2007 North American Victorian Studies Association conference for their encouragement.

My biggest thanks is due to my family, Sandra, Gordon, and Annette for their ongoing love and their continued willingness to help me in so many ways. I would finally like to thank all my wonderful friends for their support. I would especially like to thank Ruth Lockyer and Rebecca Rolls for having helped make Leamington my home for the past three years.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at another university. A small portion of the introduction (pp. 12-13), has appeared in a different form in my chapter, 'Christina Rossetti and the Bible' in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature*, ed. by Christopher Rowland, Emma Mason, Rebecca Lemon, and Jonathon Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

## **Contents**

<b>Thesis Abstract</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Note on the Text</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: ‘What is time?’: Articulating the ‘Distended’ Self through Eschatology</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Chapter 2: The Identity of the Bride of Christ</b>	<b>80</b>
i. The Typological Realisation of the Virgin Mary	81
ii. The Nun as the Bride of Christ	115
<b>Chapter 3: Reading ‘From House to Home’ as a Mystical Experience</b>	<b>134</b>
i. Ineffability	142
ii. Noetic qualities	155
iii. Transiency and Passivity	175
<b>Chapter 4: Moving beyond Eden: The Typology of the Christian Journey</b>	<b>184</b>
i. ‘Speed me with a song’: The impetus of Liturgy	185
ii. ‘A garden in a garden’: A typological reading of Rossetti’s enclosed gardens	204
<b>Chapter 5: Multiple Reflections: The ‘deep surface’ of Rossetti’s Sonnet Sequences</b>	<b>222</b>
i. ‘Not as she is but as she fills his dream’: Negotiating the Pre-Raphaelite Epipsyche	227
ii. Beyond the looking glass: Hermeneutical understandings of true feminine attractiveness	246
<b>Afterward: ‘For ever One, the Same and Manifold’</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>266</b>



## **Thesis Abstract**

### **‘We can but spell a surface history’: The Biblical Typology of Christina Rossetti**

My research examines Christina Rossetti’s use of biblical typology in her articulation of individual and communal identity. The central concern of my thesis is with tracing the ways in which she bridges the gap between the two biblical covenants and her contemporary situation by a ceaseless interpretative movement between the discourses of the Old and New Testaments. After examining the basis for her typological modes of reading, I demonstrate the various ways in which they underpin her interpretations of Tractarian, Romantic, and Pre-Raphaelite writings as well as providing her with a framework with which to structure her own poetic sequences.

In my examination of the ways in which Rossetti engages with patristic and medieval theology and articulates identity through the cyclical dynamics of typology, I consider her writings alongside those of Isaac Williams, John Keble, John Henry Newman, and Edward Pusey and highlight the key part they play in reinforcing the Oxford Movement’s liturgical momentum. Focusing specifically on her poetic utilization of the ancient practice of chanting psalms and antiphons, her engagement with the musicality of the church service, and her depiction of the visual aspects of ritualism, I read her poetry in terms of the mystical journey towards God upon which, she suggests, each Christian embarks.

Applying to Rossetti’s poetry the method of typological analysis that she herself uses, I consider how the poems in her 1893 volume, *Verses*, can be understood to comment upon her earlier works and how her earlier poetry can be seen as an antecedent to her later works. Through this, I trace the development of her theology as it engages more directly with the hermeneutical principles encouraged by the Tractarians and offers a basis upon which the patristic concept of trinitarian personhood can be understood.

## List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used parenthetically in the text for frequently cited works by Christina Rossetti.

<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of Christina Rossetti</i> , 4 volumes, ed. by Antony H. Harrison (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1997-2004)
<i>CP</i>	<i>Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems</i> , Text by R.W. Crump, Notes and Introduction by Betty S. Flowers (London: Penguin, 2001)
<i>WMR</i>	<i>The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes</i> , ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan & co., 1904)
<i>FD</i>	<i>The Face of the Deep: A devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse</i> (London: SPCK, 1892)
<i>TF</i>	<i>Time Flies: A Reading Diary</i> (London: SPCK, 1885)
<i>LS</i>	<i>Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments</i> (London and Brighton: SPCK, 1883)
<i>CS</i>	<i>Called to Be Saints, The Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied</i> (London: SPCK, 1881)
<i>SF</i>	<i>Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite</i> (London: SPCK, 1879)
<i>AD</i>	<i>Annus Domini: A Prayer for Each Day of the Year</i> (London: James Parker & Co., 1874)

### **Note on the Text**

Notwithstanding my investigations into Rossetti's biblical hermeneutics, this thesis has been written as a work of literary scholarship. As such, the theological terminology used corresponds with the terminology familiar to Christina Rossetti and the writers of the Tractarian movement rather than with that of contemporary theologians. Following the pattern of Rossetti's devotional prose, all the biblical passages I have quoted are, unless stated otherwise, taken from the King James Version and the Psalms are taken from the Prayer Book Psalter.





## Introduction

Recognising the affinity that exists between the hermeneutical practice of typology and the development of poetic structures, this thesis traces the various ways through which Christina Rossetti's devotional and non-devotional poetry works to bridge the gap between the Old and the New Testament. Throughout my investigation of how Rossetti finds and generates meaning in the space between the various books of Scripture so as to fashion various models of subjectivity, I do a combination of three things. First I analyse how, through a variety of poetical techniques, she engages with the various models of identity offered in Scripture. Next, I explore and define the mysticism inherent in her writings. Finally, I trace her development as a poet and theologian and investigate her increasingly theological engagement with the models of trinitarian personhood offered by the patristic Fathers. Exploring the interrelation that exists between Rossetti's habits of poetic composition and her method of typological thinking, I suggest that all of her devotional writings are a *product* of her Christian faith. As such, I emphasise the characteristics that they share with the books of the Bible and the patristic elements of male Tractarianism.

In her 1856 poem, 'A Christmas Carol for my Godchildren' (*CP*, p. 792-794) Rossetti conflates the 'star' (line 2) which, according to Matthew, led the wise men to the infant Jesus (Matthew 2:9) with the illumination that she believes is offered to each individual by the Holy Spirit. Demonstrating her adherence to Peter's instruction to 'take heed' of the 'sure word' of prophecy until 'the day star arise in your hearts' (2 Peter 1:19), she compares her 'life' to the 'journey' of the wise men and 'their star' to 'God's Book' (lines 37-8). In her

1874 book, *Annus Domini: A Prayer for Each Day of the Year*, she repeats her typological interpretation of the star of the nativity when she prays,

O LORD Jesus Christ, the Bright and Morning Star, as once by a star  
Thou didst lead the Wise Men unto the sure mercies of David, so now by  
Thine Illuminating Spirit guide us, I pray Thee, to Thyself: that we with  
them, and by the Grace of the same Most Holy Spirit, may offer unto  
Thee gold of love, frankincense of adoration, and myrrh of self-sacrifice.  
Amen. (prayer no. 366)

I want to suggest that Rossetti's practice of calling her readers to join together and obediently follow 'Thine illuminating Spirit' serves as the central impetus behind her devotional prose and poetry. By confidently expressing the notion that the 'same Most Holy Spirit' who led the wise men guides the lives of each individual believer, she underscores her particular method of typology whereby she reads Biblical history in relation to the immediacy of the Kingdom of God. As I will demonstrate, throughout her later devotional poetry, she develops and exemplifies the doctrine that the 'God Who worked' in the life of Biblical characters is also 'working here' ("Go in Peace," *CP*, p. 529, line 7) and uses it as a basis upon which to conflate the nineteenth-century Christian with various biblical persona.

To a certain extent, Rossetti considers all of her readers as 'Godchildren' for whom she is responsible for guiding lovingly through a godly interpretation of the Bible and towards recognition of the immediacy and power of God. In *The Face of the Deep*, she writes that Rachel's declaration "'Give me children, or else I die'" is foolish since 'the childless who make themselves nursing mothers of Christ's little ones are the true mothers in Israel' (*FD*, p. 312). In her book, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, feminist theologian Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza claims that one of the 'driving forces' behind her own work is 'the question of how feminist biblical interpretation can keep our

biblical readings from reinforcing the dominant patriarchal system and phallogentric mind-set of Gilead [in Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale*].'<sup>1</sup> Anticipating Fiorenza's revisionist hermeneutics, I would like to suggest that by repeatedly figuring herself as a 'nursing mother' who acts as a conduit of the Holy Spirit and offers 'true' guidance, Rossetti implicitly eschews a patriarchal exegesis. By presenting a hermeneutics of comfort, instruction, and guidance, she demonstrates an adherence to a nurturing and communal interpretation which works alongside the theology of her male contemporaries in the Oxford Movement to gently encourage the individual believer towards further spiritual growth.

As she continues to pray for the 'Grace of the [...] Most Holy Spirit' to illuminate her spiritual journey, Rossetti demonstrates her attitude to the practice of typological hermeneutics. Preceding her meditation on St. John's assertion of the sanctity of the Bible, she implores God to 'fill' herself and her readers with 'reverence [...] for Thy most holy written Word.' She prays that He would 'give us grace to study and meditate in it, with prayer and firm adoring faith: not questioning its authority, but obeying its precepts and becoming imbued by its spirit' (*AD*, prayer no. 314). By indicating her willingness to be 'fill[ed]' with 'reverence' and 'grace,' she suggests that it is only through the process of 'becoming imbued' with the love of Christ and the 'spirit' of the 'Word' that she is able to write at all. Exploring the significance of the concept of 'becoming imbued,' I wish to argue that her depiction of the gradual process of being transformed into a reflection of the divine constitutes the central axis upon which

---

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 4.

her entire corpus is founded.

According to Nicolas Lossky, the men of the Oxford Movement, like the writers of seventeenth century Anglicanism, received from the Patristic Fathers ‘a specific sense of the very nature of theology.’ However, rather than remaining content with reading and studying patristic writings, he suggests that they made the theological concerns of the Fathers their own. Working with the conception that the main characteristic of their patristic approach to theology is that it is ‘practical’ rather than speculative, in that it calls men to salvation and a new life in Christ; he suggests that for the Tractarians, the precept of godly obedience takes precedence over any form of theological study.<sup>2</sup> By asking that God would ‘Teach us to prostrate our understandings’ before the ‘mysteries’ of the Scriptures (*AD*, prayer no. 314), Rossetti demonstrates her adherence to this patristic approach and suggests that the authority with which she writes comes not from herself but from God. Considering that her writings engage more and more with the concepts of godly obedience and divine authority, throughout the course of this thesis, I will suggest how she gradually maps the diminishment of the ‘I’ that imprisons the individual in the material dimensions of the world and embraces the notion of *becoming* part of the larger body of the Communion of Saints through the Holy Spirit.

In her discussion of St. Augustine’s utilisation of Typology, Catherine Brown Tkacz speaks of its dynamic properties. She writes that ‘The Christian is *progressively* to understand more fully the unity of revelation through typology

---

<sup>2</sup> Nicolas Lossky, ‘The Oxford Movement and the Revival of Patristic Theology,’ in *From Oxford to the People*, ed. by Paul Vaiss (Hertfordshire: Gracewing, 1996), pp. 76-83 (p. 77-8).

and even more than that, the unity of experience' (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup> Diane D'Amico notes the progressive shift in Rossetti's treatment of the Bible in her devotional poetry of the 1880's when she suggests that she moves from 'echoing the message of Ecclesiastes to echoing the First Epistle of St. John.' She argues that, 'The Rossetti of later poems is the spiritual poet who, in an age of religious doubt, kept singing that God is Love.'<sup>4</sup> However, bringing her poetry into dialogue with patristic understandings of personhood means recognising that the division between her early and later poetry is not so straight-forward. In their discussion of Rossetti's hermeneutical practices, Jan Marsh and Mary Arseneau speak of her sensitivity to the 'intratextuality' within her own work. They suggest that, just as the New Testament comments on the Old, so too does Rossetti use one text to comment on another and encourage readers to consider the ways in which, 'within her volumes of poetry individual poems, as well as the two sections of poetry, echo, explicate, and critique each other.'<sup>5</sup> Developing this model of intratextuality; in each chapter, by reading several of her earlier poems alongside a sequence from *Verses*, I demonstrate the correspondence that exists within Rossetti's entire corpus and trace the development of her theology as it engages more directly with the hermeneutical principles that were being advocated by the Tractarians.

In 1837, John Henry Newman published the first of three editions of his *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church*. In these, he sought to reaffirm

---

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Brown Tkacz, 'Typology,' in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 855-857 (p. 856).

<sup>4</sup> , Diane D'Amico, *Faith Gender and Time* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Arseneau and Jan Marsh, 'Intertextuality and Intratextuality: The Full Text of Christina Rossetti's "Harmony on First Corinthians XIII" Rediscovered', *Victorian Newsletter*, 88 (1995), 17-26 (p. 21).

the identity of the Anglican Church in relation to the early Church of the Fathers and position its doctrines simultaneously alongside those of Roman Catholicism and popular Protestantism. Developing his ideas, he argues that the ‘main object’ of his lectures is to ‘furnish an approximation in one or two points towards a correct theory of the duties and office of the Church Catholic.’ Following this, he argues that

Popular Protestantism [...] abandons the subject altogether: Rome supplies a doctrine, but, as we conceive, an untrue one. The question is, what is that sound and just exposition of this Article of Faith, which holds together, or is consistent in theory, and, secondly, is justified by the history of the Dispensation, which is neither Protestant nor Roman, but proceeds along that *Via Media*, which, as in other things so here, is the appropriate path for sons of the English Church to walk in? What is the nearest approximation to that primitive truth which Ignatius and Polycarp enjoyed, and which the nineteenth century has lost?<sup>6</sup>

Newman’s suggestion that the true Anglican Church stood in the *Via Media*, or ‘the middle way’ is, I argue, central to an understanding of Rossetti’s engagement with Tractarianism and its negotiations with Roman Catholic and popular Protestant doctrine. Negotiating a middle path between the ecclesiastical model of authority offered by the Roman Church and the emphasis placed on individualism by the Protestant church, I wish to suggest that Rossetti’s devotional poetry can be seen to correspond to the theology that Newman propounded in the years leading up to his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1845. In the sonnet she wrote following his death in 1890, Rossetti remembers Newman as a ‘weary Champion of the Cross’ who ‘Chose love not in the shallows but the deep’ (‘Cardinal Newman,’ *CP*, p. 584-5, lines 1, 6). Bearing in

---

<sup>6</sup> John Henry Newman, ‘Introduction,’ in *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church: Via Media* (1837; 1838; 1877), in *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, ed. by H.D. Weidner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 63. In his ‘Textual Appendix,’ Weidner notes the variant readings of the three editions. The passage quoted follows the reading of the first two editions.

mind that she continues to honour him as a ‘Champion’ in spite of his conversion to Roman Catholicism suggests that she considers him, like herself, a pilgrim in search of the true church and in constant danger from the ‘flood’ of rebuttal that has the potential to overwhelm an adventurous soul (line 8). In his survey of church history, Rowan Williams suggests that ‘we need to bear in mind that the Reformation debate was not one between self-designed Catholics and Protestants; it was a debate about where the Catholic Church was to be found.’<sup>7</sup> With their ecclesiastical inheritance in mind, I wish to suggest that for both Newman and Rossetti, locating the ‘middle way’ of Anglicanism was not a question of labelling or positioning but was rather an integral part of searching for the origins of the true Catholic Church and avoiding the heresies that they perceived as a corrupting influence.

In the Introduction to the 1925 edition of *Verses*, the only place where the editor, W.K.L.D, departs from paraphrasing William Michael’s memoir of his sister comes in his passing observation that Rossetti’s arrangement of *Verses* ‘represents her maturest judgment.’<sup>8</sup> This observation is exceptional amongst Rossetti scholars. David Kent and Dolores Rosenblum account for the lack of critical attention that the sequencing of *Verses* has received by the consideration that, in the 1904 collected edition of Rossetti’s poetry, perceiving no ‘definite plan’ (*WMR*, p. vi), William Michael disregarded Rossetti’s scheme and arranged selections from *Verses* in chronological order.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, the fact that his

---

<sup>7</sup> Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2005), p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> W.K.L.C., ‘Introduction,’ in *Verses by Christina Rossetti* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1925), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> David A. Kent, ‘Sequence and Meaning in Christina Rossetti’s *Verses* (1893),’ *Victorian Poetry*, 17 (1979), 259-264 (p.261); Dolores Rosenblum, ‘Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence,’ in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 132-156 (p. 153).



remained the only collected edition until the first volume of Rebecca Crump's variorum edition was published in 1970 has meant that many readers of Rossetti's verse lacked the opportunity to note her own method of careful sequencing. Nonetheless, the fact that by 1914, twenty-one thousand copies of *Verses* had been printed means that the volume has never been as difficult to access as Rossetti's devotional prose (W.K.L.C., p. 10). Hence, this excuse cannot justifiably be applied to scholars. With this in mind, I want to suggest that it is more likely that the critical neglect that *Verses* has suffered is a result of its complex theological content alongside the fact that almost all of the poems that constitute the volume were re-printed from Rossetti's earlier prose volumes rendering a consideration of their sequencing secondary to an analysis of their original context.

Alongside her devotional prose, I argue that the complex theological content of *Verses* is a result of Rossetti's endeavour to integrate a patristic approach to typology into her own hermeneutical practices. Lossky proposes that by adhering to this practice, the Tractarians discover 'the very important difference which exists between the person understood as an individual and what patristic theologians would be tempted to call 'true personhood.' He suggests that whereas 'in the Evangelical perspective, an individual, as the very term indicates, is an atom of humanity, a self sufficient being defined by his or her limits,'

In the patristic perspective [...] 'personhood' does not belong to the *natural* experience of the human being (By 'natural' I mean a human being in his or her autonomous self, without reference to God). Personhood for the Fathers- and this is what the Tractarians rediscovered- is revealed by God to humankind. The revelation comes from Jesus Christ when He speaks of His relation with the Father and with the Spirit (in particular in the Gospel according to John: 14-17). The three persons of

the Trinity, as many Fathers have said ‘share the unsharable’, i.e. divinity; they abide in eternal communion, being both absolutely inseparable and absolutely distinct, which is a perfect paradox or philosophical absurdity, or again a ‘crucifixion’ for the Christian believer’s mind. (italics in the original, Lossky, p. 78-9)

It is with this Tractarian re-discovery of the patristic conception of ‘personhood’ as divine revelation that Rossetti is most interested. As I will demonstrate, her typological practice is more concerned with integrating this notion of personhood into the wider framework of the Communion of Saints than with identifying the limits of individual agency. Added to this, I want to suggest that she moves beyond a discourse of revelation to one of active participation and self-oblation.

Amongst the writings of the Patristic Fathers, the text that had the most influence upon Rossetti’s conception of personhood was St Augustine’s *Confessions*. Antony Harrison contends that Rossetti discovered in Augustine ‘exemplary subject matter for her poetry, as well as a more rigorously philosophical sanction for her vocation as a writer’ and a hermeneutics she ‘may well have perceived as a paradigm for her own.’<sup>10</sup> Rossetti’s familiarity with the *Confessions* is also noted by Lona Mosk Packer in her reading of the tropes of temptation and sin in ‘Goblin Market.’<sup>11</sup> However, despite these references, an extended scholarly analysis of her deployment of Augustine’s works has yet to be carried out. Whilst such an analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, I wish to demonstrate the significance of interpreting certain aspects of Rossetti’s theology in the context of an Augustinian framework. Rossetti first demonstrates her familiarity with St. Augustine’s *Confessions* in her 1879 book, *Seek and Find*. After reflecting upon Paul’s assertion of the world’s desperate need of

---

<sup>10</sup> Antony Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Brighton: Harvester, 1988), p. 100-101.

<sup>11</sup> Lona Mosk Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 142-3.

God's mercy, she writes that 'St Augustine has illustrated a kindred lesson: One prayed, Lord take away the ungodly man: and God answered him, Which?' (*SF*, p. 79). In her 1885 book, *Time Flies*, she gives a short biography of the life of Augustine when she celebrates his feast day. Following her emphasis on lives which remain relatively 'unknown' on earth, but yet are 'well known [...] in Paradise' (*TF*, January 13; p. 11-12), she focuses on the powerful effect of the prayers of his mother, Monica (*TF*, August 28; p. 166-7). Such *avowed* familiarity with the fourth century masterpiece is unusual for Rossetti who often masks her hermeneutical insights with self-deprecating remarks and repeatedly professes an ignorance of scholarly texts. Despite never claiming first-hand knowledge the *Confessions*, by alluding to its contents and utilising its imagery, Rossetti demonstrates its influence over her development as an intellectual.

Rossetti's own claim to 'devout meditative ignorance' (*FD*, p. 286) has undoubtedly contributed to the twentieth-century critical dismissal of her active engagement with Tractarian theology. Bearing in mind that she was a frequent reader at the British Library and a regular correspondent with some of the most prominent men of the Oxford Movement, I wish to challenge this dismissal and argue that her engagement with the literary and theological climate of the mid to late nineteenth century is indisputable.<sup>12</sup> In 1981, GB Tennyson initiated a challenge to the critical dismissal of Rossetti's intellectual prowess in his claim that she was 'the true inheritor of the Tractarian devotional mode in poetry.' In his book, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, he argues that her poetry brings to fruition much of what the Oxford Movement advocated in theory and sought to

---

<sup>12</sup> Susan David Bernstein notes that Rossetti perused research in the British Library especially between the years 1876 to the early 1890s when she lived nearby. She gives her ticket ref. no. as Ad.17.10.1860 in her article, 'Radical Readers at the British Museum: Eleanor Marx, Clementina Black, Amy Levy,' *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, Issue 3.2 (2007), <[www.ncgsjournal.com](http://www.ncgsjournal.com)> [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> August 2008].

put into practice. Added to this, he speaks of the need to read Rossetti's poetry in its Tractarian context and recognises that her 'genesis is of a more conventional kind' than has often been supposed.<sup>13</sup> Over the past couple of decades a number of critics have developed Tennyson's arguments and focused on the Tractarian context of Rossetti's work. For instance, Emma Mason claims that recognising her engagement with Tractarian theology rescues Rossetti 'from dismissal as a merely pious poet' and 'contextualises her secretive poetics.'<sup>14</sup> My intention is to build upon, and move beyond, the recent interpretative foundations that she, Diane D'Amico, Mary Arseneau, and Lynda Palazzo, have established so as to represent Rossetti's figurations of trinitarian personhood as symptoms of her counter-cultural hermeneutics which nuances the system of theology in which she was deeply-rooted. Recognising the significance of his introductory claim that the poetry of the Oxford Movement 'is as much cause and symptom as it is result' (Tennyson, p. 8), I want to suggest that Tennyson does not adequately consider Rossetti's share in the establishment and the re-enforcement of the Movement's belief system.

In *The Face of the Deep*, warning that 'Interpretation may err and darken knowledge' (p. 549), Rossetti highlights the dangerous temptation of pride and individualism. A letter she wrote to the Pre-Raphaelite artist Frederick Shields in 1881 indicates her eagerness to avoid this sin firstly by prayer, and secondly, by actively participating in a communal, rather than individual, hermeneutical process (*Letters*, ii, p. 308-9; 31 October 1881). By appealing to male figures such as Shields, Isaac Williams, and Dr Richard Frederick Littledale, she wards

---

<sup>13</sup> G.B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*, (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 198-200.

<sup>14</sup> Emma Mason, 'Christina Rossetti and the Doctrine of Reserve,' *Journal of Victorian Culture* 7 (2002), 196-219 (p. 215).

off the charge of unfounded creativity and emphasises her belief that the process of hermeneutics is one which is divinely inspired and is to be undertaken as part of the larger Communion of Saints rather than as an individual.

According to Mary Arseneau, Rossetti first came into contact with Littledale in 1864. He later became her confessor and a personal friend.<sup>15</sup> Whilst David A. Kent and P.G. Stanwood insist that Rossetti ‘undoubtedly would have read and been affected by’ Littledale’s essays, Desmond Morse-Boycott suggests that Rossetti was drawn to his concern for the inward as well as the outward observances of ritualism, as well as to his witty versatility.<sup>16</sup> Although there are none directed to him, Rossetti’s letters show evidence of the friendly intimacy they shared which allowed for discussions on pressing theological matters. In 1881, she wrote to Alexander Macmillan asking that they send Littledale a copy of *A Pageant and Other Poems* since he ‘is an influential person in more ways than one and friendly towards my work’ (*Letters*, ii, p. 296; 22 August 1881). Jan Marsh claims that, in 1879 Littledale’s influence extended to advocating the publication of *Seek and Find* with SPCK.<sup>17</sup> In recognition of Littledale’s encouragement and influence upon her work, I trace the development of Rossetti’s theology as it engages more thoroughly with Tractarian concerns and participates more actively in the growth of High-Anglican hermeneutics.

In *Time Flies*, Rossetti demonstrates that her understanding of the Patristic Fathers is mediated largely through a Tractarian framework when she

---

<sup>15</sup> Mary Arseneau, ‘Pews, Periodicals, and Politics: The Rossetti Women as High Church Controversialists,’ in *Outsiders Looking in: The Rossettis Then and Now*, ed. by D. Clifford and L. Roussillon (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp. 97-114 (p. 99).

<sup>16</sup> *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti*, eds. by David A. Kent and P.G. Stanwood (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 377; Desmond Morse-Boycott, *Lead, Kindly Light: Studies of Saints and Heroes of the Oxford Movement* (London: The Centenary Press, 1933), p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 463.

voices her familiarity with the introduction to John Mason's Neale's 1856 book of translated medieval sermons, *Medieval Preachers and Medieval Preaching* (TF, December 1; p. 229). In the preface to this book, Neale writes that

The passages quoted from Scripture are always from our own version (the Psalms from the Prayer Book), except where a marked difference in the Vulgate, or some peculiar turn of expression, would have made the authorised translation incapable of expressing the full meaning of the preacher.<sup>18</sup>

Following this maxim, Rossetti consistently uses the 1611 King James Version of the Bible alongside the Prayer Book Version of the Psalms. Once the Revised Version, the only officially authorised revision of the King James Bible was published in 1885, she utilises it in *The Face of the Deep*. She writes that 'the two translations combined kindle hope, gratitude, confidence, excite emulation' (FD, p. 111). The following reflection of the two renderings of Revelation of 3:8 is typical of the comparative interpretative method she utilises throughout her last devotional commentary:

According to the first [King James Version] rendering, the "open door" seems to be a reward of the works summed up afterwards. The second [Revised Version] rendering, by making the "door opened" parenthetical and so connecting the works directly with their ensuing summary appears to announce that opened door as a bounty and safe-guard rather than as a reward. While as to the good works themselves, the first version leads our thoughts to a habit of faith and courage; the second, to a distinct crisis of temptation overcome by those virtues. (FD, p. 111)

Although this form of comparative study was unavailable to Rossetti for much of her life, her earlier devotional poetry and prose exhibit the same passion for meditating on the specifics of the language of the Bible in order to inspire fellow Christians to emulate the self-sacrifice of Christ. By introducing her interpretation of the passage hesitantly with the words 'seems' and 'appears,' she

---

<sup>18</sup> John Mason Neale, *Medieval Preachers and Medieval Preaching: A series of extracts, translated from the sermons of the middle ages* (London: J. & C. Mozley, 1856), p. vi.

exhibits the caution she maintains throughout her works, demonstrating her fear of appearing ‘overbold’ (*FD*, p. 551) in her hermeneutics.

In Tract 3 of the *Tracts for the Times*, ‘Thoughts Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy On Alterations in the Liturgy,’ Newman warns his readers to ‘Be prepared [...] for petitioning against any alterations in the Prayer Book, should any be proposed’ and, in ‘Tract 4, Adherence to the Apostolical Succession the safest Course,’ John Keble encourages his readers to act lest ‘some measure of tyranny [...] be practised against us as regards the Prayer Book.’<sup>19</sup> Discussing the established pattern in the Church of England of repeating the whole of the Psalms once a month, Evan Daniel notes that the Church grew attached particularly to the Prayer Book Psalter and argues that its ‘smooth and melodious cadences’ are ‘better suited for musical purposes than the more correct but harsher Authorized Version.’<sup>20</sup> Taking this into account, it would seem that in addition to a sense of familiarity, which would have been installed in her through her regular attendance of Christ Church, Albany Street, it is likely that Rossetti’s preference for the Prayer Book Version of the Psalms is a result of a recognition of its poetical and musical qualities.

Exploring the notion, exemplified in the Prayer Book, that a correct notion of the self and the Bible comes from understanding both within the framework of the larger body of the Communion of Saints, in *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti writes that

---

<sup>19</sup> John Henry Newman, ‘Tract 3, Thoughts Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy On Alterations in the Liturgy’ (1836), in *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford*, 6 vols (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1841), i, p. 5; John Keble, ‘Tract 4, Adherence to the Apostolical Succession the safest Course’ (21 September 1833), in *Tracts for the Times*, i, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Evan Daniel, *The Prayer-book : its history, language and content*, (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co, 1901), p. 111-2.

All who are united to Christ are thereby united to one another. The Communion of Saints flows in one continuous stream from the One Fountain Head; descends as one unbroken chain link by link from that irremovable anchor our only hope, the Cross of Christ.' (p. 209-10)

It is her figuration of community that, I want to argue, gives shape and meaning to Rossetti's two final volumes, *The Face of the Deep* and *Verses*. In his study of the significance of understanding one's faith in the context of, what Rossetti terms, the 'one unbroken chain' of ecclesiastical continuum, Rowan Williams suggests that

Christian faith demands that we find a way of speaking about God as more than an individual possessed of divine nature, yet without falling into the mythological trap of supposing several divine individuals. What slowly and haltingly emerges is a sense of divine plurality as interrelation of subsistent actions, each distinguished by its relation to the others, each existing as an act of self-bestowal, self-emptying, a going-out from individuality into identity in and with the other. The innately mysterious character of distinctive personal identity thus imagined is something that has to be thought through in relation to humanity as well as divinity, since human beings are in God's image. And so we come to the position that human personal being has about it something of the utter resistance to category and species-being that we see in interrelating life of God. The persons of the Trinity are not projections of human individuality [...] it is rather that human individuality is a fractured picture of divine personal being. The more we leave behind the idea of a self as one among many centres from which a set of repeatable attributes is exercised, the more we move to understand our selfhood as fulfilled only in self-forgetful relation, the more we realise the divine image which is the fundamental potential of our humanity. (Williams, *Why Study the Past?* p. 99)

It is the notion of leaving 'behind the idea of a self as one among many centres' and finding authentic identity 'in self-forgetful relation' with God that Williams' theology can be used as a basis for the interpretation of Rossetti's poetics. He suggests that it is by interpreting the self in relation to the Trinity and not the Trinity in relation to the self that a true understanding of personhood can be attained. By conceiving of the self as an ineffable 'fractured picture of divine personal being,' he adheres to the Pauline doctrine that whilst in the world, 'we



see through a glass, darkly' (1 Corinthians 13:2), and argues that it is through the process of turning one's gaze to God and by recognising God's image in human beings that spiritual vision becomes clearer and 'the potential of our humanity' can be fully realised.

I wish to align Rossetti's poetry with Williams' depiction of human individuality as a reflection of 'divine plurality' and suggest that a re-consideration of the feminist discourse that has been used to critique her poetry over the last few decades is necessary. When she looks to both the Old and New Testaments for representations of the self as clay, fire and shadow, Rossetti demonstrates that a fractured or extinguished sense of subjectivity is not necessarily negative. For her, the coherent unified self needs to be broken down in order that a more authentic self can emerge and integrate itself in the body of Christ. Toril Moi suggests that the concept of the seamlessly unified self that Anglo-American feminists including Elaine Showalter and Marcia Holly seek to identify is, in effect, a product of patriarchal ideology.<sup>21</sup> She contends that the belief in this model of the unified self plays 'directly into the hands of [...] phallic aesthetic criteria' (p. 67). Although the move away from this belief can be both threatening and de-stabilizing, challenging the framework within which Rossetti's poetry has been understood, I want to suggest it is also restorative. Indeed, when it is recognised that Rossetti has her subjects conceive of themselves in terms of, what Williams terms, a 'fractured picture of divine personal being,' she has them reach an understanding of their intrinsic subjectivity which is rooted more fully in God and the fellowship of believers.

In her 1858 poem, 'A Better Resurrection' (*CP*, p. 62), Rossetti uses

---

<sup>21</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/ Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 8.

metaphors of self-destruction such as ‘a faded leaf’ and ‘a broken bowl’ (lines 9, 17) to articulate her developing ideology of personhood. Exploring how the individual can become malleable in the hands of God, she offers comfort in her reassurance that restoration is available in that the self can be ‘melt[ed] and remould[ed] [...] till it be | A royal cup for Him my King’ (lines 22-3). As I develop my investigation of Rossetti’s concern to articulate ‘the different shape’ of personhood offered by an engagement with the notion of self-destruction and divine restoration, I demonstrate how Rossetti’s reflections challenge the growth of the belief in the cult of the individual that was being propounded by her contemporaries. Added to this, considering the patristic based Tractarian emphasis on identity as communal and dialogic, I explore Rossetti’s investigation of the dynamic interface of spiritual communion and typological hermeneutics.

In chapter one, ‘“What is time?”: Articulating the ‘Distended’ Self through Eschatology,’ I link the gradual process of reaching typological understandings to the notion of ‘becoming imbued’ by God’s spirit (*AD*, prayer no. 314). I suggest how Rossetti’s deployment of a patristic model of hermeneutics not only works to illustrate the historical events recorded in Scripture, but also demonstrates the unity of the past with the future and highlights the significance of typological understanding in the present. Exemplified through her use of the poetic form of the roundel, I argue that Rossetti’s explication of the schema of the time in the sequence in her 1893 volume *Verses* entitled ‘Divers Worlds: Time and Eternity,’ illustrates how an understanding of the dynamics of typology affects the very foundations of individual and communal identity.

Following this investigation, in the next chapter, 'The Identity of the Bride of Christ,' I explore the notion of interpreting the self as a mirror image of God and highlight the ramifications of this understanding for the shaping of individual and communal identity. Offering an analysis of the five poems about the Virgin Mary which are included in the third sequence in *Verses*, 'Some Feasts and Fasts,' I consider how Rossetti depicts the physicality of the process of transforming of the self into a mirror of the Divine. Using the theoretical framework that Teresa Brennan establishes in her 2004 book, *The Transmission of Affect*, I discuss Rossetti's explication of the sensory experience of the believer as she is transformed into a member of the Community of Saints by the Holy Spirit. In the final part of the chapter, I consider the figure of the nun as a manifestation of the process whereby the individual merges her identity with Christ's and emanates his virtues through offering herself as a mirror to his love. Through a close reading of several of the convent poems that Rossetti composed in following the establishment of Anglican sisterhoods, I highlight the ways in which she is able to dramatise the complexities involved in reaching an understanding of the individual's integration in the patristic concept of trinitarian personhood.

In chapter three, 'The Varieties of Religious Experience in 'From House to Home,' I consider Rossetti's investment in the nineteenth-century engagement with both mystical experiences and mystical interpretations. In her 1858 poem, 'From House to Home,' Rossetti describes visionary experiences in the context of the struggle for spiritual enlightenment. Investigating these experiences alongside the spiritual journey depicted in the final sequence of *Verses*, 'Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims,' I highlight their affinities to the

ritualism of the church service and to the liturgical practices of the Tractarians.

Continuing to explore the significance of liturgy to an understanding of the dynamic process of typological exegesis, in the first part of chapter four, ‘Moving Beyond Eden: The Typology of the Christian Journey, I discuss how Rossetti’s development as a poet and a theologian can be seen to correspond to the development of Tractarian ritualism and doctrine in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By focusing on her depiction of saints in *Verses*, and by considering the ways in which their journeys offer an interpretative structure through which the thematics of her earlier poems can be understood, I demonstrate how Rossetti is able to reinforce Paul’s teaching that all who believe in Christ are ‘called to be saints’ (Romans 1:17). In the second part of the chapter, I read several of Rossetti’s early poems which speak of the space of the enclosed garden in conjunction with the poems included within her later sequence, ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens.’ Alongside this investigation of Rossetti’s poetic conflation of life with death in the space of the garden, I approach her understanding of the intermediate realm of Hades from a fresh perspective, arguing that the Paradise she repeatedly speaks of is not to be seen as Heaven itself but rather the place where the redeemed are to await the second coming of Christ. Developing this argument, I consider how she works with the allegorical figuration of the *hortus conclusus* which was prevalent in Renaissance literature and art. In conclusion, I draw attention to Rossetti’s figuration of the material and the spiritual and argue that, for her, the enclosed garden is to be valued primarily for what it teaches the believer about her own soul and her relationship with God.

In my final chapter, ‘Multiple Reflections: The ‘deep surface’ of

Rossetti's Sonnet Sequences,' I examine the typological impulses exemplified in a comparative study of Rossetti's 1856 sonnet, 'In an Artist's Studio' (*CP*, p. 796) her 1881 sonnet sequences, *Monna Innominata* (*CP*, p. 294-301) and *Later Life* (*CP*, p. 346-359), and the opening sequence of *Verses*, "Out of the Deep Have I Called unto Thee, O Lord" (*CP*, p. 389-396). All four, I argue, work with the issue of namelessness, rely on biblical depictions of female beauty, and juxtapose surface reflection with inner depth as they explore the difficulties of finding and articulating an authentic trinitarian selfhood. It is my contention that as Rossetti moves towards representing this trinitarian selfhood as amorphous and fluid, she works with the structure of the sonnet and the sonnet sequence to offer a direct critique of the traditional Western model of a unified selfhood. Concluding, I highlight some of the ramifications of my investigation for the future of Rossetti scholarship.

## Chapter 1: ‘What is time?’: Articulating the ‘Distended’ Self through Eschatology

Throughout his writings, St. Augustine repeatedly explores the notion of the self as ‘distended’ through time. In the *Confessions*, he focuses particularly on the danger of being broken off from God by the changeableness of the times and seasons of the world. Considering the process of ‘*Forgetting what is behind*’ and becoming ‘not distended but *extended*,’ he declares

*I follow on for the prize of my heavenly calling, where I may hear the voice of Thy praise, and contemplate Thy delights, neither to come, nor to pass away. But now are my years spent in mourning. And Thou, O Lord, art my comfort, my Father everlasting, but I have been severed amid times, whose order I know not; and my thoughts, even the inmost bowels of my soul, are rent and mangled with tumultuous varieties, until I flow together into Thee, purified and molten by the fire of Thy love.*<sup>1</sup> (italics in the original, highlighting the phrases taken directly from the Psalms)

Developing the notion of being ‘purified and molten by the fire’ of God’s love, he moves onto reason that

Weight makes not downward only, but to his own place. Fire tends upward, a stone downward. They are urged by their own weight, they seek their own places. Oil poured below water, is raised above the water; water poured upon oil, sinks below the oil. They are urged by their own weights to seek their own places. When out of their order, they are restless; restored to order, they are at rest. My weight, is my love; thereby am I borne, whithersoever I am borne. We are inflamed, by Thy Gift we are kindled; and are carried upwards; we glow inwardly, and go forwards. We ascend Thy ways that be in our heart, and sing a song of degrees; we glow inwardly with Thy fire, with Thy good fire, and we go; because we go upwards to the peace of Jerusalem: for gladdened was I in those who said unto me, We will go up to the house of the Lord. There hath Thy good pleasure placed us, that we may desire nothing else, but to abide there for ever. (*Confessions*, xiii.9.10, p. 282)

---

<sup>1</sup> St Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine Revised from a Former Translation*, trans. by Edward Pusey (Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1843), book xi, part 29, section 39, p. 247. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text citing the book, part, section, and page number and signified by the title *Confessions*.

In his investigation of Augustinian metaphors of movement in Dante's souls, Philip Cary argues that the metaphor of fire 'gives Dante a way to portray both movement and rest for the soul, as well as the immobility of the soul in hell.'<sup>2</sup> He suggests that in his declaration, 'My weight, is my love,' Augustine posits that 'the weight of charity, the love of God, pulls up upward with a motive force like fire seeking its place of rest in the heavens.' As flame does not rest until it reaches heaven, he argues that 'the will afire with charity keeps the restless soul in movement until it finds rest in the heavenly Jerusalem with God' (Cary, p. 27).

Following Cary's suggestion that 'the movements of Dante's souls are governed by [...] [Augustine's] metaphor of fiery charity' (ibid, p. 15), I wish to argue that a similar dynamic is exemplified in the development of Rossetti's devotional poetry whereby the dynamics of time and space, whose order Augustine claims he 'know[s] not,' are rendered increasingly futile in the face of the movement of souls to God. The first poem that Rossetti includes in her 1883 reading diary, *Time Flies*, begins with the lament 'A heavy heart, if ever heart was heavy' (January 4; p. 4). Tracing the movement of her soul as she loses the burdens that weigh her down and finds hope and rest and rest in the 'bevy | Of thousand thousand choirs' (line 13), the speaker proclaims, 'Lifted to Thee my heart weighs not so heavy, | It leaps and lightens lifted up to Thee' (lines 11-12). In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti develops this metaphor of the soul being 'lifted up' to God by engaging more thoroughly with Augustine's notion of being 'inflamed' and 'kindled.' She writes that 'if we belong not' to the 'illustrious

---

<sup>2</sup> Philip Cary, 'The weight of love: Augustinian metaphors of movement in Dante's souls,' in *Augustine and Literature*, ed. by Robert P. Kennedy, Kim Paffenroth, and John Doody (Lanham : Lexington Books, 2006) pp. 15-36 (p. 28).

company' of saints, we 'abide within sight of it' before praying that God would 'grant that the shining lights may shine, glow, radiate, more and more, and that the lookers-on glorifying the Father of all, may catch fire' (*FD*, p. 114).

Throughout *Verses*, she moves onto develop Augustine's metaphor of fire so as to depict the transcendence of individuality and map the fiery ascension of souls and wills to the state of holiness described in Revelation.

In her 1879 book, *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite*, Rossetti demonstrates her familiarity with Augustine's notion that individuals can conquer the 'tumultuous varieties' of time when they 'flow together into Thee, purified and molten by the fire of Thy love.' She reflects that 'the heart offered as a whole burnt-offering to Him becomes fuel not to His consuming jealousy but to His undying love' (*SF*, p. 51). In my introduction, I spoke of how 'A Better Resurrection' (*CP*, p. 62) highlights God's ability to 'Melt and remould' (line 22) the self through love in order that it be transformed from 'A broken bowl' into 'A royal cup' (lines 22-3). Continuing to explore how Rossetti uses various poetic illustrations to describe the process of being 'purified and molten by the fire' of God's love, the remainder of this chapter considers her participation in the Tractarian practice of using the writings of Augustine and the other Patristic Fathers as tools through which to expound the concepts of time and eternity and define the parameters of a trinitarian personhood. Focusing primarily on the sixth sequence of *Verses*, 'Divers Worlds. Time and Eternity,' I demonstrate how Rossetti builds upon Augustine's alignment of the 'distension' of human identity with the movement of time and investigate the method whereby she incorporates his declaration, 'My weight, is my love,' into her poetics. Alongside this, I investigate the method through



which she reproduces, in roundel form, Augustine's hermeneutical technique of repeating and interweaving biblical phrases into a coherent structure.

In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti demonstrates her allegiance to the patristic practice of linking the notion of the fullness of eternity with the complete unity of the Trinity when she contemplates St John's proclamation that 'there should be time no longer' (Revelation 10:6).

What is time? It is not subtracted from eternity, which if diminished would fall short of being eternal: neither is it substituted awhile for eternity; which thus would assume both end and beginning: neither is it simultaneous with eternity, because it is in Him Who inhabiteth eternity (not time) that we ourselves day by day live and move and have our being. Perhaps I shall not mislead my own thoughts by defining to myself time as that condition or aspect of eternity which consists with the possibility of probation. (*FD*, p. 278)

Twelve years earlier, in *Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments*, Rossetti had grappled with the thought that 'there may [...] be no conception more difficult for ourselves to clench and retain than this of absolute Unity; this Oneness at all times, in all connexions [sic], for all purposes' (*LS*, p. 11). As subtracting or adding to such Unity and Oneness would be impossible, so too she suggests, would subtracting or adding to eternity. Despite reiterating the difficulty of 'clench[ing]' the conception of this divine 'Unity' in her devotional prose, I want to suggest that, throughout the 'Divers Worlds' sequence, Rossetti utilises poetic form to indicate the eschatological realities that she struggles to articulate. For instance, in her poem 'We know not when, we know not where' (*CP*, p. 479), following her recognition that 'We know not what that world will be' (line 2), she acknowledges the wonder of the glimpses that are available to believers. In addition, by conflating the anticipation voiced in the words of the first two refrains, 'To see' (lines 4, 8), with the promise contained in the two words of the final refrain, 'One day' (line 12), she signifies a movement away

from the uncertainty of the first line and towards an expectation of 'One day' seeing God 'face to Face' (line 11). By figuring Christ's 'grace' (line 7) as the axis upon which the movement of the poem revolves, she emphasises her belief that a true understanding of 'absolute Unity; [and] this Oneness at all times' is a divine gift and is not to be attained by natural means.

Considering her engagement with Tractarian theology and her familiarity with St. Augustine, it is likely that Rossetti would have read Edward Pusey's 1838 translation of the *Confessions*. In its preface, he argues that time

has no existence of which we can take account, except in the human mind, and that it has no relation whatever to eternity; eternity being no extension of time, and time being but a creature of God, an incident only in eternity, which once was not, as it shall once cease to be. (*Confessions*, p. xxviii-xxix)

He moves on to claim that the difficulties in comprehending the finite nature of time as opposed to the permanence of eternity should not be taken as an obstacle to reaching an understanding of our true personhood in the Trinity. Instead believers should, he argues, remain willing 'to remain in suspense for a time, receiving what seems to be true, even though it involve apparently the truth of other things which we cannot see' (*Confessions*, xxix). Adhering to Pusey's interpretation of time as a confusing realm of 'suspense,' Rossetti's elucidation of the temporal schema as consistent with the 'possibility of probation' highlights the limitations imposed on each individual as they seek to secure their salvation.

In *The Face of the Deep*, following the inclusion of her poem, 'Time seems not short' (*FD*, p. 278/ *CP*, p. 481), where she depicts time as the 'sole battle-ground for right and wrong' (line 13), Rossetti contemplates the dynamics of time and eternity as she offers typological reading of Ecclesiastes by

considering its message in relation to other excerpts of Scripture. This method of creative harmonising, used extensively by the Apostolic Fathers and forming a central foundation upon which Tractarian theology is built, stands as the central interpretative principle upon which Rossetti's entire corpus is based. In her analysis of Rossetti's use of Ecclesiastes, Christine Joynes argues that the intertextuality that permeates her poetry

Should [...] alert us to the importance of relating the Old and New Testaments even where explicit citations are lacking. Too often biblical critics have overlooked connections between Ecclesiastes and the New Testament, since Ecclesiastes is only explicitly alluded to once in it (Rom. 8.20).<sup>3</sup>

Although, as Joynes suggests, the typological connections that exist between Ecclesiastes and the New Testament are often overlooked by contemporary critics, it is Rossetti's negotiations with the hermeneutics of the Patristic Fathers with which I am most concerned. Unlike later biblical scholars, they deliberately explore more implicit biblical correspondences and suggest reading the entire Old Testament in light of the New, Ecclesiastes being no exception. Indeed, it is likely that the method whereby Rossetti sought a corresponding New Testament verse for each phrase constituting Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (*FD*, p. 278-280) derives directly from the pattern set by patristic writings such as the *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* by Gregory of Nyssa. As an influential figure for the theologians of the Oxford Movement, it is likely that Rossetti was aware of, if not familiar with his writings. By following the interpretative precepts set out by Gregory and the other theologians of the early Church and by conflating the words of Ecclesiastes with Jesus' teachings about time and eternity, she demonstrates the typological

---

<sup>3</sup> Christine E. Joynes, 'Treasure in Heaven? Christina Rossetti's use of Ecclesiastes,' in *The Quest for Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Philip Budd*, ed. by Christine E. Joynes (Cambridge, Orchard Academic, 2002), pp. 7-28 (p. 23).

practice of Christological sequencing that underpins her hermeneutics. This practice intertwines the individual and the communal aspects of identity so thoroughly that they cannot be considered separately. For instance, Rossetti reads the declaration that there is ‘a time to hate’ (Ecclesiastes 3:8) alongside Christ’s warning as given in Luke 14:26 that ‘If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple’ (*FD*, p. 280). In addition to interpreting the ‘time to hate’ as the moment when the disciple must make a decision between following the world and following Christ, by reading both verses in conjunction, she highlights the immediacy of the spiritual battle and offers an explication of her understanding of true trinitarian personhood. Indeed, the notion that a believer can ‘hate [...] his own life’ as he does the lives of those around him suggests that his life cannot be seen in isolation but must instead be considered in a framework of community.

Notwithstanding his apt recognition that a consideration of the sequencing of *Verses* was ‘long overdue,’ David Kent’s argument that the structure of the book can ‘best be described as having two major movements;’ with the first four sections centering ‘on the speaker’s personal growth,’ and the second four shifting to ‘a more cosmic, impersonal vantage point’ overlooks Rossetti’s investment in the patristic doctrines of inter-personal growth whereby the personal and the cosmic are inextricably intertwined.<sup>4</sup> In his book, *Radical Christianity: A Reading of Recovery*, Christopher Rowland highlights the contrast between the apocalyptic understandings of Augustine and those of

---

<sup>4</sup> David A. Kent, ‘Sequence and Meaning in Christina Rossetti’s *Verses* (1893),’ *Victorian Poetry*, 17 (1979), 259-264 (p. 261-2).

Joachim of Fiore. Rather than looking forward to the completion of God's promises within human history he notes how, in Book 20 of *The City of God*,

Augustine sets in train a pattern of interpretation which viewed the conflict between God and Satan as one which took place now within the individual soul rather than some eschatological conflict in the world which would herald a new era. Thus preoccupation with a future earthly millennium was thereby excluded, and that hope of an alternative paradigm for world order on which millennial dreams depend was subtly undermined.<sup>5</sup>

Considering how Rossetti imitates Augustine's 'pattern of interpretation' and re-appropriates his concern with tracing the eschatological conflict which, according to Rowland, rages 'within the individual soul,' I contend that through the tightly wrought structure of *Verses* she leads the reader towards, rather than away from, an intensely *personal* vantage point. 'It is herself, really, that she puts into these poems, her deepest self,' an early reviewer of *Verses* wrote.<sup>6</sup> Rather than speculating upon autobiographical occurrences, I want to suggest that Rossetti's figuration of the central eschatological conflict within the human soul pertains to the 'deepest self' of humanity and the universal dimensions of trinitarian personhood.

In her book, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth Century Poetry*, Isobel Armstrong aligns the idealist epistemology of the individual with the structure of language itself. This alignment, she claims, is based upon the notion that the language and form of nineteenth-century poetry can be regarded 'a model of the structure of consciousness or being itself.'<sup>7</sup> Reflecting upon this claim, I wish to highlight the various ways through which Rossetti moves her

---

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Rowland, *Radical Christianity: A Reading of Recovery* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988) p. 84.

<sup>6</sup> ANON, Review of *Verses*, *The Athenaeum* (16 Dec 1893), p. 842-43, quoted in *Christina Rossetti: A Reference Guide*, ed. by R.W. Crump (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976), p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-century Poetry* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. xiii.

theological investigations ‘forward with little bits of verse’ (*Letters*, iii, p. 346; 22 November 1886) and engages with what, in his *Confessions*, Augustine terms the ‘inmost soul’ (*Confessions*, x.40.65, p. 12). Instead of moving in a linear direction from one ‘vantage point to another’ as Kent suggests, the repetitions and refrains that occur throughout *Verses* indicate the inter-dependence of the personal and the cosmic. They point to a cyclical model of understanding whereby the apocalypse is interpreted simultaneously in the world, the Communion of Saints, and the soul of the individual, and the journey towards Heaven is depicted as a circumferential ascent. In her essay, ‘The Trouble with Comfort: Christina Rossetti, John Ruskin, and Leafy Emotion,’ Emma Mason argues that just as leaves grow and fall in spirals, so too do humans ‘move back and forward to get anywhere at all.’<sup>8</sup> Building on Mason’s exploration of how Rossetti renders the journey of the soul in terms of the spiral, I wish to demonstrate how her engagement with biblical typology foregrounds the image of an upward and inward spiral that she presents throughout her devotional poetry.

In her article, ‘Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence,’ Dolores Rosenblum maps the concept of supernatural vision and the cyclical patterning of Christian typology onto the deliberate sequencing inherent in the volumes Rossetti edited herself. Examining the ‘sequences within sequences’ and ‘the Chinese boxes of Rossetti’s religious verse,’ she writes,

Rossetti follows out a train of associations which is almost “free,” in that rhymes call up meanings that call up other rhymes and meanings and which circle round—as, in psychoanalysis, associations circle round—to

---

<sup>8</sup> Emma Mason, ‘The Trouble with Comfort: Christina Rossetti, John Ruskin, and Leafy Emotion,’ *Yearbook of English Studies*, 36:2 (2006), 169-79 (p. 176).

underlying obsessions and fixations [...] and simultaneously break through to new grounds of feeling.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout 'Divers Worlds,' 'underlying obsessions and fixations' with the imagery of smoke, mists, mountains, chimes, the sea, harvesting, and flowers can be evidenced. It is by having this imagery 'circle round' in the sequence, calling up other meanings and typological associations that Rossetti is able to break through 'to new grounds of feeling' and offer her existential understanding of what it means to circle inwards from a state of distension to find stability in God's presence.

Considering her focus on the disjunction that exists between a worldly and a heavenly perspective, it is likely that Rossetti chose the title 'Divers Worlds' with reference to the concept of living in uncertain times where affinities are torn between the worlds of time and eternity. Throughout, she suggests that individual identity is unstable because communal identity is chaotic and 'out of tune' with the rhythms of Heaven ('Earth has clear call,' line 6). In the first five poems of the sequence, she juxtaposes both worlds by highlighting the contrast between physical and spiritual vision. In the fifth, a roundel entitled "Behold it was very good" (*CP*, p. 474-5), she aligns the biblical narrative of creation whereby 'God saw every thing that he had made' and declared 'behold, it was very good' (Genesis 1:31) with St. John's vision of the world where there 'shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying' (Revelation 21:4) or, as she writes, 'Not mourning any more' (line 10).

All things are fair, if we had eyes to see  
How first God made them goodly everywhere:

---

<sup>9</sup> Dolores Rosenblum, 'Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence,' in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 132-156 (p. 155).

And goodly still in Paradise they be,—  
All things are fair.

O Lord, the solemn heavens Thy praise declare;  
The multi-fashioned saints bring praise to Thee,  
As doves fly home and cast away their care.

As doves on divers branches of their tree,  
Perched high or low, sit all contented there  
Not mourning any more; in each degree  
All things are fair.

In the commentary preceding the roundel's earlier inclusion in *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti offers a commentary on John's vision of the living creatures (Revelation 4:8).

If these be the same living creatures as those Ezekiel beheld by the river Chebar, their aspect seems to have been revealed with a difference to St. John. To Ezekiel each appeared four-faced as Man, Lion, Ox, Eagle: St. John describes each individual as exhibiting one or other such face. Ezekiel assigns four wings to each; St. John six. Balancing together the two descriptions it may perhaps be thought that Ezekiel saw more of the physical aspects, exhibited in multiplied faces and in those hand hands and feet which he alone registers; St. John more of the spiritual significance, expressed by wings in greater number: these two revelations of the Cherubim thus corresponding respectively with the two dispensations; of which the elder dealt in carnal ordinances, the latter (thank God, our own) deals in spiritual realities. (p. 158)

Suggesting that Ezekiel's vision pertains to the 'more physical aspects' of creation, whilst John's illuminates 'more of the spiritual significance,' she highlights the typological methodology upon which her entire corpus is based. It is my argument that the act of 'balancing together the two' dispensations in order to understand 'our own' situation that underpins her hermeneutics and shapes her poetry.

In "Behold it was very good," the 'balancing' together of the two dispensations is emphasised through the refrain, 'All things are fair' (lines 1, 4, 11) which serves to enclose her contemplations within the boundaries of God's



‘goodly’ (lines 2, 3) creation. By having the refrain contract the verbal and visual structure of first and the third verses of the roundel, Rossetti uses it to create a silence which serves an interpretative space for the reader. Indeed, whereas the rhythm and the alliteration of the rest of the poem means that it can be read at speed, a natural pause occurs following the insistent repetition of the refrain. I want to suggest that it is in this pause that the reader is encouraged to stop and reflect upon the meaning of the words and their relation to the rest of the poem. By carrying the depiction of the doves over from the second to the third verse as she describes them flying home and finding peace in the branches of a protective tree, she exemplifies the process of unlocking the complexities of the Old Testament by reading it through the framework of the New Testament apocalypse. Throughout *Verses*, by repeatedly associating the image of the tree with Noah’s Ark, the tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9, 3:22,24), and the tree in Revelation (2:7; 22:2,14) which, she argues, is representative of ‘Christ Crucified for our salvation’ (*FD*, p. 523), she renders each believer a homeward bound dove and thus balances and harmonizes ‘each degree’ of existence (line 10).

Rossetti’s depiction of ‘multi-fashioned saints’ (line 6) as ‘doves on divers branches of their tree’ (line 8) can be seen to engage with the utilisation of the word ‘divers’ in the book of Hebrews. It opens,

God, who at sundry times and in *divers manners* spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. (emphasis mine, Hebrews 1:1-3)

Considered in conjunction with the notion that God communicates with his people ‘in divers manners,’ Rossetti allusion to believers as ‘doves on divers branches [...] | Perched high or low’ (lines 8-9) can be seen to highlight the immediacy of the presence of God that, she suggests, would be apparent ‘if we had eyes to see’ (line 1). Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett suggest that Hebrews 1 illustrates the fundamental difference between Jewish and Christian thought in their argument that

Jewish roots and Christian fruits are encapsulated in that statement about continuity and discontinuity, dependence and difference. The line of the prophets is continued and disrupted by Jesus the son: The representation of Jesus as prophet in the gospels is here abandoned. Not only is Jesus God’s son, he is also the effulgence of God’s glory and the very character (stamp) of God’s person (c.f. ‘the icon of the invisible God’ of Col.1:15). This emergent Christology of Hebrews marks a serious parting of the ways for Jews and Christians.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout her entire corpus, Rossetti elaborates on the continuity and discontinuity of the two Testaments as she draws together verses from both in order to highlight their correspondence and difference. ‘Thus far similarity: afterwards contrast’ she argues as she reads the ‘earthly mountain’ that Moses glimpses from Pisgah in conjunction with the ‘unearthly mountain’ of the New Jerusalem which ‘descends to appease desire’ (*FD*, p. 496).

In *Seek and Find*, Rossetti demonstrates her early commitment to contrasting the worldly with the eternal through the framework of the Christology of Hebrews:

When as samples of Old Testament servants of God we select some [...] who evidently and eminently have prefigured Christ, at the least in some point of their career, we shall many times find them characterized by that very incompleteness (if I may term it so: for I mean a very different thing

---

<sup>10</sup> Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, ‘Notes to the New Testament,’ *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 389-441 (p. 430).

from the defect named incompleteness) which we have been considering.  
(*SF*, p. 147)

In her analysis of this passage, Cynthia Scheinberg suggests that ‘understanding the distinctions in Rossetti’s quite particular interpretations of Jewish difference reveal, ultimately, an acute anti-Judaism as a central aspect of her poetics.’<sup>11</sup>

Following this, she argues that

Rossetti’s distinction between the idea of “incompleteness” and “uncompletedness” is a significant moment in her negotiations with the entire problem of both gendered and religious difference. The terms are distinguishable through temporal implications: “uncompletedness” gives a temporal quality to the state of “lack,” which allows for the future possibility of becoming completed. “Incompleteness,” on the other hand, has no temporal component, implying instead a permanent quality of lack. The “Old Testament servants of God” are not in a state of permanent lack, nor are they “other” to some understanding of Christian identity; instead, they have potential, through the process of Christian interpretation, for “completedness,” or total Christian identification. Though she repeatedly imagines Jews and certain women as deficient identities, essentially incomplete at any given present moment, both have (through Christian belief and a typological insertion in Christian narrative) the ability to achieve totality, completeness and equality. (*italics in the original*, Scheinberg, p. 117)

Whilst I recognise the validity of Scheinberg’s suggestion that the distinction Rossetti makes between ‘incompleteness’ and ‘completedness’ is based upon the difference between temporal and spiritual components, I wish to disagree with her argument that Rossetti ‘repeatedly imagines Jews and certain women as deficient identities’ and thereby reveals ‘an acute anti-Judaism.’ In direct contradistinction to her argument, I want to suggest that Rossetti’s hermeneutics simply corresponds to the Christology of Hebrews. In light of her belief that through his passion, Christ has ‘purged our sins, [and] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high’ (Hebrews 1:3), she repeatedly emphasises that spiritual completeness has *already* been accomplished for all. Thus, she identifies the

---

<sup>11</sup> Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 108.

parameters of identity as more complex than simply a question of ‘incompleteness’ and ‘completedness’ and suggests that it is the tension of living *between* the ‘Divers Worlds’ of incompleteness and completion that characterises each individual whether Christian or Jewish. Indeed, whilst she remains insistent in her claim that the spiritual completion of ultimate desire is available to all, she suggests that attaining it is not a matter of human strength but of supernatural grace.

Towards the end of the ‘Divers Worlds’ sequence, Rossetti includes her poem, ‘The half moon shows a face of plaintive sweetness’ (*CP*, p. 481-2). Here, she uses the figure of the moon to express her belief in supernatural grace, exemplify a model of typological interpretation, and explore notions of spiritual lack.

The half moon shows a face of plaintive sweetness  
 Ready and poised to wax or wane;  
 A fire of pale desire in incompleteness,  
 Tending to pleasure or to pain:—  
 Lo, while we gaze she rolleth on in fleetness  
 To perfect loss or perfect gain.

Half bitterness we know, we know half sweetness;  
 This world is all on wax, on wane:  
 When shall completeness round time’s incompleteness.  
 Fulfilling joy, fulfilling pain?—  
 Lo, while we ask, life rolleth on in fleetness  
 To finished loss or finished gain.

By structuring the two stanzas of poem as reflections of one another in terms of their identical diction, rhythm, and rhyme scheme, she encourages the reader to find meaning in a typological reading of contrast and comparison. As the moon mirrors the sun so too, she suggests, do ‘we’ (line 7) mirror the ‘half moon’ (line 1). In *The Face of the Deep*, she incorporates the poem into her contemplation of Revelation 8:1, ‘And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in

heaven for the space of half an hour.’ Contemplating the ramifications of this apocalyptic ‘silence’ for the individual, she suggests that ‘a Christian’s suspense ought to present a figure of that silence’ (*FD*, p. 242). In the poem, she argues that it is the *suspense* of being, like the moon, ‘Ready and poised to wax and wane’ (line 2) that prepares each individual for end times. The correspondences that exist between the two stanzas emphasise this still further. Most significantly, a consideration of lines 5 and 11 highlight the conflation of gazing and questioning that recurs throughout her poetry. In anticipation of the completion that is to come, the lines ‘Lo, while we gaze’ (line 5) and ‘Lo, while we ask’ (line 11) offer typological inferences that imbue Rossetti’s earlier, non-devotional, poetry with spiritual significance. The notion that questioning is intertwined with the process of gazing is, I want to suggest, one of the foundations upon which Rossetti constitutes trinitarian identity. Indeed, in chapter five, through analysing particular typological allusions in *Monna Innominata* (*CP*, p. 294-301), I investigate how Rossetti’s speaker moves beyond a figuration of herself as a moon which is a simple epipsychal reflection towards an understanding of herself as ‘the moon which receives’ (*FD*, p. 94) God’s blessings. However, foregrounding this exploration of the activity and receptivity of the moon-like reflective subject, I would first like to trace the imagery of reflection, mirroring, and questioning upon which Rossetti develops a model of the human soul as a reflection of the Trinity and suggest that it is through the figure of the moon that Rossetti’s concept of ‘incompleteness’ (‘The half moon,’ line 3) can best be understood.

Whereas Scheinberg’s argument relies on a linear model of time, by recognising Rossetti’s negotiations with the *cyclical* nature of time and the

‘simultaneous’ existence of time and eternity (*FD*, p. 241), I wish to argue that her concern is not with distinguishing the followers of modern Judaism as figures of ‘incompletedness’ but rather with the integration of the contemporary world into the Biblical schema. Hence, by suggesting that Rossetti inserts Old Testament characters into the ‘Christian narrative,’ I demonstrate how Scheinberg’s analysis is doubly erroneous. Indeed, Rossetti’s repeated allusions to the unity of Scripture indicates that she made no firm distinction between the two Testaments and her concern to incorporate contemporary believers into the Biblical schema is not the idiosyncratic anti-semitic practice that Scheinberg suggests. Rather, following the lead of the Patristic Fathers, I want to suggest that she simply imitates the language of the New Testament epistles.

In his 1873 sermon series, *The Characters of the Old Testament*, Isaac Williams argues that Lot ‘is very near us, as resembling that of so many among Christians.’<sup>12</sup> Through her repeated allusions to Lot’s escape from Sodom and Gomorrah, Rossetti reinforces his resemblance to the contemporary Christian and thus highlights the state of ‘uncompletedness’ both share in that they await the fulfilment of the completion that Christ brought about through his crucifixion and resurrection. By contrast, in her discussion of ‘works left incomplete’, Rossetti typologically associates Lot’s wife to ‘the fig-tree leafy but fruitless’ and ‘the son in the Parable who answered, I go sir, and went not’ (*FD*, p. 88). She follows these associations with the prayer, ‘God help us to look into ourselves, lest all the while we be such as they and know it not’ (*FD*, p. 89). By conflating Old and New Testament characters and incidents and illustrating the possibility, for each Christian, of falling into a state of ‘incompleteness,’ Rossetti

---

<sup>12</sup> Isaac Williams, *The Characters of the Old Testament* (London, Oxford, and Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1869), p. 50.

renders any firm distinction between the Christian and the Old Testament Jew obsolete. Both exist in the realm of time which, as a place of ‘probation’ awaits the fulfilment of the completion that the crucifixion renders possible (*FD*, p. 278). With this in mind, I would like to offer a further challenge to Scheinberg’s interpretation and suggest that Rossetti’s conception of Old Testament believers as typological precursors to counterparts in the New Testament indicates that her concern is not with the existence of modern Judaism and the diversity of its followers but with the promise of fulfilment in Christ.

In the fourth poem of the ‘Divers Worlds’ sequence, “Yet a Little While” (*CP*, p. 474), Rossetti emphasises the anticipation which characterises the wait for the final fulfilment in Christ. The echoing refrain of the roundel form is recalled in her repeated plea, ‘how long?’ (lines 5-6).

Heaven is not far, tho’ far the sky  
Overarching earth and main.  
It takes not long to live and die,  
Die, revive, and rise again.  
Not long: how long? Oh, long re-echoing song!  
O Lord, how long?

The fact that this six line poem is one of three for which Rossetti uses the title ‘yet a little while,’ a refrain that reoccurs throughout the Bible, indicates her method of harmonising the Old and New Testaments whilst at the same time refusing to fix the meaning of individual phrases. In *The Face of the Deep* the poem is given no title but is positioned after a reference to Jesus’ words to Peter, ‘What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter’ (*FD*, p. 11; John 13:7). However, by entitling her poem “Yet a Little While” in *Verses*, Rossetti encourages reading its proclamation, ‘It takes not long to live and die, | Die, revive, and rise again’ (lines 3-4) alongside Jeremiah’s warning of the oncoming overthrow of Babylon: ‘For thus saith the LORD [...] The daughter of

Babylon is like a threshing floor, *it is* time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come' (italics in the original, Jeremiah 51:33). Paul's address to the Hebrews, that in 'yet a little while [...] he that shall come will come, and will not tarry' (Hebrews 10:37), corresponds to this Old Testament image of God as the ultimate gardener and harvester coming to gather up the faithful and bring destruction upon the wicked. However, whereas Jeremiah refers to the redemption of the nation; in the context of Hebrews, the words point to the coming of the New Jerusalem where the saved will, as the poem anticipates, 'rise again' (line 4). Conversely, by detaching the verse from any particular Old or New Testament reference, Rossetti harmonises its various reappearances throughout both Testaments and unites them, forcing the reader to give the words as they appear in the Old Testament an added spiritual dimension that may have been missed on a previous reading. She can also be seen to affect subsequent readings of the New Testament by arguing for an increased recognition of the unity and coherence of the entire Bible.

In her examination of how Rossetti utilised the method of creative harmonising to create a cyclical patterning in her poetry as she incorporates biblical references and reinforces her interpretative authority, Dinah Roe contends that

Rossetti chooses certain biblical phrases which run like a refrain through many of her poems. In imitation of the books of the Bible in which various phrases turn up again and again to bridge the gap between different parts of the Old Testament, and between the Old Testament and the New. The significance of these phrases is unfixed, metamorphosing with each use, keeping the poet's meaning in motion.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Dinah Roe, *Christina Rossetti's Faithful Imagination: The Devotional Poetry and Prose* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 9.



As well as ‘bridging the gap’ between different parts of the Bible, Rossetti’s insistent repetition of Biblical phrases or words, especially in the refrains of her roundels, serve to bridge the gap between her non-devotional and devotional poetry. These refrains render subjectivity as relational and in constant need of re-definition. Indeed, by using certain ‘unfixed’ biblical phrases as the refrains of her roundels, Rossetti, in effect, Christianises the poetic form and positions herself alongside the biblical writers and ancient fathers whose hermeneutical practices she imitates.

Approximately a third of Rossetti’s poems which explore the dynamics of time are composed in the form of roundels. In one she left unpublished, ‘A roundel seems to fit a round of days’ (*CP*, p. 871), she compares the poetic form to ‘a weed like groundsel’ (line 5) but encourages her readers ‘to welcome it, as loftiest bays’ (line 6). In spite of the fact that she greatly admired Algernon Charles Swinburne’s 1883 volume, *A Century of Roundels*, which he in fact dedicated to her, little has been written to link the poetic forms of the both poets.

<sup>14</sup> The only mention of Swinburne that most Rossetti scholars make is anecdotal in that they note how Rossetti pasted strips of paper over offensive passages in his verses. For instance, Lona Mosk Packer writes of how, through this practice, Rossetti covered ‘the atheistic chorus in her copy of *Atalanta in Calydon*.’<sup>15</sup>

Although Jan Marsh highlights the comparisons that were made between the work of the two writers by their contemporaries and asserts that ‘there is no evidence that Christina was openly or even consciously upset by [...] the general

---

<sup>14</sup> In a letter to Swinburne, Rossetti voices her own and her mother’s admiration for her ‘newly acquired book of beauties,’ *Letters*, iii, p. 122; 9 June 1883.

<sup>15</sup> Lona Mosk Packer, *Christina Rossetti*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 353.

linkage of her work with Swinburne's,' she does little to compare their poetry.<sup>16</sup>

Considering their disparate concerns, this is not surprising. Kirstie Blair introduces the notion of comparing the work of both poets when she claims that 'in some ways, Rossetti's envisioning of a poetics of the body, in which its forces are used, unfolded, poured out, and spent, chimes with that of [Swinburne's] *Poems and Ballads*.'<sup>17</sup> Following Blair's investigation, I want to suggest that an analysis of the textual body of the roundel is necessary in establishing a fuller understanding of the dynamics of the poetics of the body.

Reflecting on the formality of the roundel structure, Kent writes that

The roundel [...] formally lends itself to a didactic intention and, by its circular and repetitive features, also fosters a sense of inevitability- the inevitability Rossetti thought appropriate to human powerlessness before providential will. Her frequent use of the roundel gives her devotional poetry much of its ceremonial and liturgical flavour.'<sup>18</sup>

Despite Swinburne's aversion to didacticism; the 'repetitive features' and the sense of 'inevitability' that Kent identifies in Rossetti's poetry form the central characteristic of his roundels. Rikki Rooksby suggests that, for Swinburne, the composition of the roundel 'was an attempt at self discipline [...] having devised the eleven-line form by adapting it from the French rondeaux.'<sup>19</sup> Considering Swinburne's disciplined figuration of time, Jerome McGann's attestation that 'his method of thought turns all sequential processes of beginnings, middles, and ends into self-contained circles' has uncanny similarities to the 'Chinese box' effect of Rossetti's religious verses that Rosenblum speaks of. McGann writes,

---

<sup>16</sup> Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 357.

<sup>17</sup> Kirstie Blair, *Victorian poetry and the culture of the heart* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 234.

<sup>18</sup> David A. Kent, "'By thought, word, and deed": George Herbert and Christina Rossetti,' in *The Achievement* (see Rosenblum, above), pp. 250-273, p. 259.

<sup>19</sup> Rikki Rooksby, *A.C. Swinburne: A Poet's Life* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), p. 253.

[Swinburne's] poetry tends not to move in a direction like a path, but to accumulate additions, like coral [...] His propensity is toward forms which do not so much move forward as they spin off from a center [sic], accumulating all the while what can be a bewildering variety of figures and images which are constantly interacting with each other.<sup>20</sup>

Read in the context of this theorisation of Swinburne's poetic 'propensity,' the conflict that Rossetti posits as existing between the 'Divers Worlds' of time and eternity can be seen to form the centre of her sequence. Spinning off from this, the examination of the various ontological implications this conflict entails forms the 'accumulate additions.' This larger sequential patterning can be identified more succinctly in the condensed form of the roundel. As Rooksby speaks of the way in which the roundel works for Swinburne in that it focuses the essence of his more substantial poetics 'into a mere eleven lines,' I would like to consider the various ways in which Rossetti conveys meaning through what Swinburne terms the apparently 'light' but nonetheless 'deep and strong' form of the roundel and, in doing so, captures some of the complexities of her typological hermeneutics within it.<sup>21</sup> By adopting Swinburne's poetic form and thereby entering into a dynamic challenging of his conceptions of time, I want to suggest that Rossetti is able to wrestle his atheistic influence away from him and make the form her own, using its structural properties as a framework through which to offer a unified hermeneutic structure to the larger volume of her poetic work. Throughout the 'Divers Worlds' sequence, Rossetti includes a sequence of roundels that work in conjunction to offer a reflection of the Christian journey towards a fuller understanding of God. At the centre, she uses the refrain of her

---

<sup>20</sup> Jerome McGann, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 141.

<sup>21</sup> Rikki Rooksby, 'Swinburne in Miniature: A Century of Roundels', *Victorian Poetry*, 23 (1985), 249-265 (p. 250); 'Dedication to Christina G Rossetti,' line 1, in Algernon Charles Swinburne, *A Century of Roundels*, in *Swinburne's Collected Poetical Works* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1927), pp. 523-707 (p. 527).

roundel 'We are of those' (CP, p. 478) to incorporate her readers into the larger schema of the Communion of Saints and to typologically revise the conception, rooted in the Old Testament and voiced in "Escape to the Mountain" (CP, p. 473-4), that Heaven exists as a 'far-off day' (line 10).

Midway through *A Century of Roundels*, Swinburne includes a poetic meditation on the roundel form:

A roundel is wrought as a ring or a starbright sphere,  
With craft of delight and with cunning of sound unsought,  
That the heart of the hearer may smile if to pleasure his ear  
A roundel is wrought.

Its jewel of music carven of all or of aught—  
Love, laughter, or mourning- remembrance of rapture or fear—  
That fancy may fashion to hang in the ear of thought.

As a bird's quick song runs around, and the hearts in us hear  
Pause answer to pause, and again the same strain caught,  
So moves the device whence, round as a pearl or tear,  
A roundel is wrought. (Swinburne, p. 575)

Emphasising its cyclical form by describing it as a 'ring or a starbright sphere,' 'a jewel,' and 'a pearl or tear' (lines 1, 5, 10), he hints at the usefulness of the roundel in conveying the non-linear dynamics of time. Compared to the sonnet, Rooksby argues the roundel is 'more like the spiral of a seashell, the opening stanza making one circle and the remainder a second, ending where the poem began, with the refrain. But at the conclusion, this is read with increased perception' (Rooksby, 'Swinburne in Miniature,' p. 252). Certainly, following the likening of the form to a 'bird's quick song' and a 'device' (lines 8, 10) that works to attune the ear of the listener to a particular 'strain' (line 9), Swinburne's refrain, 'A roundel is wrought,' can indeed be read with an 'increased perception' of its musicality and a greater appreciation of its tightly wrought structure.

Rossetti's roundels function in a similar way to Swinburne's in that they make consistent use of rhythm, alliteration, and rhyme to emphasise their musicality and encourage an 'increased perception' of the words of the refrain. However, whereas Swinburne's deliberately draw attention to their own aesthetic qualities, Rossetti's point to the spiritual realities she believes exist beyond the material substance. A consideration of 'Jerusalem of fire' (*CP*, p. 489) is particularly illustrative of this.

Jerusalem of fire  
And gold and pearl and gem,  
Saints flock to fill thy choir,  
Jerusalem.

Lo, thrones thou hast for them;  
Desirous they desire  
Thy harp, thy diadem,

Thy bridal white attire,  
A palm-branch from thy stem:  
Thy holiness their hire,  
Jerusalem.

Whereas Rossetti's depiction of 'gold and pearl and gem' (line 2) echoes Swinburne's imagery of the 'jewel,' and the 'pearl or tear' (lines 5,10), by using her refrain to contract her verse into the single word, 'Jerusalem' (lines 1, 4 ,11), she demonstrates a firm focus on the heavenly city that exists beyond the realm of language and structure. Furthermore, by having the word 'Jerusalem' disrupt and contract the regular trimeter rhythm, Rossetti reinforces the apocalyptic aspects of the heavenly city, highlighting its 'fire' (line 1) which comes to cleanse and purify. St. John describes God's dwelling in terms of an encircling emerald 'rainbow' (Revelation 4:3). This description corresponds to Ezekiel's vision of the 'appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD' as a 'fire' and a 'brightness round about' (Ezekiel 1:27-28). By incorporating this biblical

imagery of encircling brightness into the rhythmic and rhyming structure of her roundel, Rossetti reinforces its reality and gives rise to the 'desire' (line 6) which is at the centre of each individual as it is at the centre of the poem. Following the theology of Augustine, it is this 'desire' which will serve as the 'weight' of love and carry the believer upwards to the peace of Jerusalem.

In her sequence 'Gifts and Graces,' Rossetti includes the sonnet "Subject to like Passions as we are" (*CP*, p. 458-9). Structured around the notion that 'Pangs of desire are birth-throes of delight' (line 10), it looks forward to the time when God will 'Permeate with glory the new man entire' and 'Crown him with fire' (lines 6-7). The fact that this sonnet is included amongst a contemplation of God's 'Gifts and Graces' and focuses on the 'begin[ning]' (line 4) of the individual's transformation, whereas 'Jerusalem of fire' is included in the later sequence, 'New Jerusalem and its Citizens,' exemplifies the careful sequential properties of *Verses*. Indeed, in 'Jerusalem of fire,' by figuring 'desire' as a joyous rather than painful emotion, Rossetti demonstrates the poetic movement that *Verses* makes as it maps the process that Augustine describes whereby the climb of believers gets easier as they ascend higher and their weight become less earthly and more like fire.

In addition to conveying the lightness of the saints as they ascend upwards towards God, Rossetti also uses the roundel form to highlight the divine strength and protection that each individual is granted as they transform themselves into 'whole burnt-offering[s]' (*SF*, p. 51) and make their fiery ascension to Heaven. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard devotes an entire chapter to a consideration of the epistemological dynamics of the structure

of the shell. Regarding spiralled shells, he quotes from Bernard Palissy's observation that the shape was 'not at all for mere beauty.' Rather, Palissy writes,

You must understand that there are several fish with such sharply pointed beaks that they would devour most of the above-mentioned fish if the latter's abodes were in a straight line: but when they are attacked by their enemies on the threshold, just as they are about to draw inside, they twist and turn in a spiral line and, in this way, the foe can do them no harm.<sup>22</sup>

Developing Rossetti's claim that the roundel is 'like the spiral of the seashell,' I would like to suggest that Rossetti poetically deploys the 'twist and turn' of the material structure of the roundel form so as to defend and fortify the articulation of her faith. In my introduction, I suggested that Rossetti's devotional writings should be read as a product of her faith. With this in mind, by repeating certain words and phrases of Scripture and by positioning them within the poetic structure of the roundel, Rossetti can be seen to reinforce the notion her poetry serves as an echo of the Bible and as an expression of the doctrine that each individual serves an echo or mirror of the Trinity. In contrast to Rossetti, Swinburne demonstrates that his primary concern is with the aesthetic and material properties of the poetic form itself. Whereas, following her utilisation of the metaphor of 'a most exquisite shell, composed of two halves, which join together make up one flawless heart' (*TF*, July 9; p. 131), Rossetti conceives of her poetry as a fortification, a mirror, or an echo; Swinburne conceives of his solely as a material construct which exists, in Palissy's words, 'all for mere beauty.'

A typical example of Swinburne's focus on the aesthetic in his contemplation of the cyclical nature of time occurs in his double roundel, 'Time

---

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Palissy, 'About a fortress city,' in *Recepte Veritable* (ed. Bibliotheca romana), p. 151, quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 128.

and Life' (Swinburne, p. 535-6). Here the refrain of the first, 'Time, thy name is sorrow,' emphasises the destructive qualities of the movement of time which 'hunt[s] and hound[s]' the individual 'down to death and shame' (i, line 7). In the second, the refrain, 'Nay, but rest,' conveys the sense of the world-weariness the speaker feels as his 'Eyes forspent with vigil, faint and reeling' (ii, line 8) collapse into oblivion. In contrast, by bringing a biblical understanding of time to "Escape to the Mountain," Rossetti challenges the reader of Swinburne to situate his speaker who remains 'stricken', and 'laid waste with wasting flame' (i, lines 1-2) in the framework of Old Testament history and to read him in relation to those sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah looking helplessly on as destruction begins to overtake them. By Christianising Genesis 19:27-29, where Abraham looks down upon Sodom and Gomorrah and watches as the 'smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace,' she emphasises God's mercy in sparing Lot's life. Incorporating the words of Christ's proclamation that 'he who shall endure unto the end [...] shall be saved' (Mark 13:13) into the final verse of her poem, she brings eschatological hope to what appears a futile world.

Yet still the light of righteousness beams pure,  
Beams to me from the world of far-off day:—  
Lord, Who hast called them happy that endure.  
Lord, make me such as they. (lines 9-12)

In addition to introducing an understanding of the deployment of the word 'happy' as a substitute for 'saved' (line 11), this verse builds on the depiction of God's eternal schema that is outlined in the previous poems of *Verses*. More significantly however, it anticipates the spiritual significance of the refrain of the following roundel, 'I lift mine eyes to see' (*CP*, p. 474).

The refrain, 'I lift mine eyes to see' is derived from the words of Psalm 121, the second of the 'songs of ascent.' In this, the Psalmist declares, 'I will lift



up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help' (verse 1). Following this, he traces his gradual realisation of God's character until he is able to confidently assert, 'The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore' (verse 8). Imitating the structural pattern of the psalm, Rossetti structures her roundel as a 'song of ascent' in that through it, she articulates the process whereby the 'Death that shadows' can be overcome and the 'Healing' and the 'Life' (lines 5, 9-10) that can be found in Christ can be recognised.

I lift mine eyes to see: earth vanisheth.  
 I lift up wistful eyes and bend my knee:  
 Trembling, bowed down, and face to face with Death,  
 I lift mine eyes to see.

Lo, what I see is Death that shadows me:  
 Yet whilst I, seeing, draw a shuddering breath,  
 Death like a mist grows rare perceptibly.

Beyond the darkness light, beyond the scathe  
 Healing, beyond the Cross a palm-branch tree,  
 Beyond Death Life, on evidence of faith:  
 I lift mine eyes to see.

The suggestion that the recognition of a new 'Life' comes 'on evidence of faith' (line 10) corresponds to the words Jesus speaks to Thomas, 'blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed' (John 20:29). By implicitly recalling these words, Rossetti reinforces the typological context through which she reads the Psalms and introduces to the poem the notion of 'eyes that have been supernaturalised' by an encounter with Christ (*FD*, p. 116). By incorporating a new rhyme sound in the final verse with the words 'scathe' and 'faith' (lines 8, 10), she linguistically re-enacts the new illumination that she believes can only be reached 'beyond the Cross' (line 9). In addition, by typologically reading the poem through the framework of its final verse, her belief that only the

illumination of the cross can disperse the overshadowing ‘mist’ (line 7) is made apparent.

In *The Face of the Deep*, following the insertion of ‘I lift mine eyes to see’ within a contemplation on the fall of Babylon, Rossetti writes

It emphasises to our apprehension the momentous difference between eternity and time, to read that “her smoke rose up for ever and ever.” Throughout time smoke is an emblem of transitoriness, evanescence, as both the Canonical Scriptures and the Apocryphal Books teach us:- “As smoke is driven away, so drive them away” ...”The hope of the ungodly is like ... as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest.”

Time with all its possibilities is yet a day when that which is wanting cannot be numbered. Eternity with all its impossibilities is yet the day when God will require that which is past. (*FD*, p. 430)

By incorporating direct quotations from the Psalms and the apocryphal book, the Wisdom of Solomon, Rossetti echoes the writings of the Patristic Fathers and offers a typology which is only accessible to the dedicated reader of the Bible. In addition, she implicitly highlights the correspondence of the structures that exist in the poetry she includes in *Verses* and those that she develops throughout her devotional prose. Returning to her suggestion that poetry helps her theology ‘forward’ (*Letters*, iii, p. 346; 22 November 1886), these correspondences can be seen to act as devices through which the poetic qualities of her prose and the theology inherent in her poetry can be identified.

Recalling the incidents in the ‘Canonical Scriptures’ of Abraham’s temporal experience and St John’s supernatural vision, the speaker of ‘I lift mine eyes to see’ can be aligned to Rossetti herself in view of fact that she echoes the commentary offered in *The Face of the Deep* by speaking of watching as ‘earth vanisheth’ (line 1) and ‘death like a mist’ (line 7) encompasses its surroundings. Prefiguring the finality described in ‘For Each’ (*CP*, p. 487) where ‘Day and night in one mist are blended’ (line 3), the roundel works to move the

accompanying commentary ‘forward’ by encouraging each believer to grasp the true hope offered by God before it is too late rather than depend on the transitory hope offered by the world. More explicitly than in the previous poem, the Christianising of Lot’s escape to the mountains comes in the final verse as ‘Healing beyond the Cross’ (line 9) is made visible once a realisation of Christ’s sacrificial act of redemption comes to the fore. Indeed, the refrain contributes to the sense of looking upwards and seeing the ‘world of righteousness’ (line 2) that the speaker of “Escape to the Mountain” can only imagine as existing above the smoke and darkness of earth and Hades.

“Escape to the Mountain” begins ‘I peered within and saw a world of sin’ (line 1). Alongside the fact that the speaker looks within herself before gazing upwards at ‘the world of righteousness’ (line 2); by positioning the verse before a poetic contemplation of lifting up one’s eyes to see life beyond death ‘on evidence of faith’ (‘I lift mine eyes to see, line 10), Rossetti voices her belief that an understanding of Heaven can only come about *after* an act of introspection has been performed. In this, she echoes Augustine who, in his *Confessions*, writes that it is *only* through the process of introspection that we can identify the three aspects of time that exist in the soul; ‘present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation’ (*Confessions*, xi.20.26, p. 239).

Five years after translating the *Confessions*, Pusey gave a series of lectures on Typology. In these, he reflects on Augustine’s notion of the human ability to comprehend something of the divine through the intensive process of introspection when he argues that

God and His ways and his Nature we can of course know but in part; and our highest knowledge must be our indistinctest; for that which is most

dearest must most surpass our comprehension; it belongs to another sphere and just touches, as it were, upon that wherein we dwell; its centre is not the world; and so we cannot surely it encompass; its very proportions we can discern only here and there, as we see 'parts of His ways' bearing one upon another; as a whole we see nothing, because we are not at the centre whence it can be seen; our most spiritual faculties are just allied to it, and we are in the flesh. Because we are of God, and born of God, we have in some sense for beholding the things of God; but because we are in the flesh, and 'no man can see God and live' [sic]. The light but parts from between the cloud, lest we are bestruck down to the earth and blinded. Whatever then we gain in distinctness and precision we lose in depth; our furthest point of vision is just where 'light and darkness part.' The soul, through that which is divine in it, just putteth forth itself, and half-seeth things invisible, but cannot declare them or embody them in words. St Paul's highest revelations and visions were 'unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.'<sup>23</sup>

As she implicitly positions her theology alongside Pusey's and engages with the same theological concerns as St. Augustine, Rossetti uses imaginative and inclusive forms to 'putteth forth' the soul and hint at the 'things invisible.' For instance, in *The Face of the Deep*, reflecting on the biblical proclamation, 'They shall perish; but thou remainest' (Hebrews 1:11), she writes 'Of old He declared, "I change not": it is men that shall be changed. Sin forgiven, guilt abolished, infirmity healed, the possibility of lapse ended, we ourselves (please God) shall be renewed when all things are made new' (p. 483). It is the phrase 'we ourselves' that highlights Rossetti's preoccupation with imaginatively entering the biblical schema and points to her concern with positing the transformation of the individual soul as the axis upon which any substantial changes are made and battles won. Building on Pusey's suggestion that whilst in the flesh, 'we are not at the centre' from 'whence' the motions of Heaven 'can be seen;' by considering the transformation of the self as it enters into the life of the Spirit,

---

<sup>23</sup> Edward Pusey, 'Lecture on Typology,' Pusey House, unpublished manuscript (Oxford, 1836), p. 2-3, quoted in David Jasper, 'Pusey's 'Lecture on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament,' in *Pusey Rediscovered*, ed. by Perry Butler (London: SPCK, 1983), pp. 51-70, (p. 54-5).

Rossetti suggests that it is imperative to understand the individual as part of the larger body of the Communion of Saints.

To discuss the renewal and regeneration of the individual within the larger Communion of Saints, and to poetically re-enact the relationship between man and the Trinity, Rossetti repeatedly utilises images of the four seasons. In *Seek and Find*, she argues that ‘The seasons of the waxing and waning year have a parallel in the periods of our mortal life’ (*SF*, 56). In many of her earlier poems which are focused upon the development of the individual soul, she highlights the insignificance of ‘our mortal life’ when it is compared to eternity when she depicts a solitary room which is shut off from the life cycles of the changing seasons. For instance, in her 1859 poem, ‘L.E.L.’ (*CP*, p. 147-149), the solitary room exists within the speaker at the same time as she attempts to hide away in it. Lamenting that her ‘heart is breaking for little love,’ she confines herself to her ‘solitary room above’ where she turns her ‘face in silence to the wall’ avoiding the beauty of nature and the changing of the seasons outside (lines 2-4). In her notes on the poem, Marsh writes that Rossetti’s ‘acknowledgment of her poetic foremothers’ includes allusions to ‘Landon’s ‘Night at Sea’ and Felicia Hemans’s ‘A Parting Song.’<sup>24</sup> Echoing the speaker of Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s 1841 poem, ‘Night at Sea,’ who denounces the ‘fairy legends’ that she once read, Rossetti has her own L.E.L lament the shallow nature of her companions who praise the ‘rustling show’ of her gowns but fail to recognise the individual beneath (line 24).<sup>25</sup> Significantly however, by preceding the poem with a sonnet based on Ecclesiastes, ‘Vanity of Vanities’ (*CP*, p. 147) and by ending it on a

---

<sup>24</sup> Jan Marsh, ed., *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose* (London: Everyman, 1994), p. 435.

<sup>25</sup> L.E.L. (Letitia Elizabeth Landon), *Life and Literary Remains*, 2 vols. (London: Fisher, Son, & Co, 1841), i, p.190-195, lines 70, 24.

note of eschatological anticipation, Rossetti introduces a biblical framework through which the both L.E.L.'s poetry and her own non-devotional verses can be understood. The final verse of 'L.E.L.' reads,

Yet saith a saint: "Take patience for thy scathe;"  
 Yet saith an angel: "Wait, for thou shalt prove  
 True best is last, true life is born of death,  
 O thou, heart-broken for a little love.  
 Then love shall fill thy girth,  
 And love make fat thy dearth,  
 When new spring builds heaven and clean new earth." (lines 36-42)

By proposing a vision of time from the perspective of eternity, this verse encourages the avoidance of entanglement with the transient world by renunciation, disassociation, and solitude. Like the preacher of Ecclesiastes who claims that he has 'seen all the works that are done under the sun' and beheld that 'all is vanity and vexation of spirit' (Ecclesiastes 1:13), Rossetti's lamenting L.E.L. is taught to reject the illusionary promise that the earthly spring brings and look forward to the ultimate 'new spring' which 'builds heaven and clean new earth' (line 42). Throughout her poetry, Rossetti does not present this process of expectedly looking forward as a constant state of passivity. Rather, she repeatedly highlights the urgency of beginning to 'build' and 'clean[se]' the self in anticipation of the coming kingdom. In my analysis of 'I lift mine eyes to see,' I noted how Rossetti uses the phrase, 'Beyond the darkness light, beyond the scathe | Healing' (lines 8-9) to introduce a sense of divine illumination. In 'L.E.L,' the instruction to 'Take patience for thy scathe' (line 36) alongside the propositions 'shall' and 'when' (lines 39, 42) anticipates the sense of eschatological anticipation that, I wish to suggest, *Verses* exemplifies.

In Rossetti's 1881 volume, *A Pageant and Other Poems*, her sonnet sequence 'The Thread of Life' (CP, p. 330-331) articulates the movement away

from the lamenting speakers of her early poetry, who suffer under the ‘scathe’ (‘L.E.L,’ line 36) of suffering, and towards the joyful and patient believers in *Verses*. Referring to the spiritual ascent from worldly concerns through renunciation and towards deep understanding, it begins with the speaker’s acknowledgment of the ‘irresponsive silence’ (sonnet 1, line 1) of the external world as she struggles to come to terms with her own identity. Anticipating the declaration in *The Face of the Deep*, that it is ‘I who undo, defile, deface myself’ (*FD*, p. 489), the ‘I’ of the speaker is further described as a ‘prison’ (sonnet 2, line 1) that prevents her from continuing on her journey towards God. Confining her to a ‘flawless band | of inner solitude’ (sonnet 1, lines 5-6), it is only when she freely foregoes this ‘I’ of her individuality that she is able to reach a realisation of herself as an indestructible part of God’s kingdom that supersedes the onslaught of ‘Time’s winnowing’ (sonnet 3, line 4). Subsequently, she is freed to join in the ‘sweet new song of His redeemed set free’ (sonnet 3, lines 11-12).

Noting her increased emphasis on individual self oblation in the face of God’s love, I wish to argue that Rossetti’s writings of the late 1880’s and early 1890’s begin to incorporate the notion of giving the self over to God for renewal, regeneration, and remoulding within the Tractarian concept of trinitarian personhood. Indeed, her increasing interest to map the parameters of selfhood onto a trinitarian model parallel those being articulated by the leading men of the second phase of the Oxford Movement who repeatedly demonstrate their concern with the rediscovery of patristic theology. In his discussion of this rediscovery, Nicholas Lossky writes that

God in His trinitarian life [...] becomes the perfect prototype of unity in diversity, of personhood. For in this perspective, a ‘person’ is by

definition a being-in-communion, a relational being who cannot be saved by himself alone.

Coming to this realisation of 'relational being,' Lossky argues, entails understanding that life is 'to be lived as a community (since it must needs be in communion)' and 'as Church (which is communion with Christ and in Christ with all creation).'<sup>26</sup> The fact that 'Divers Worlds' follows the sequence 'Some Feasts and Fasts,' which moves from a focus on the individual to a focus on the universal catholic church, is indicative of an expectation that readers approach the later sequence with a sense of existing as, what Lossky terms, 'a being-in-communion.' In Rossetti's 'Divers Worlds' sequence, only four poems are written using the personal pronoun 'I' whereas ten are written using the collective terms 'we' and 'our.' This in itself demonstrates her concern with interpreting the self in terms of his or her relationship to a particular community.

I wish to suggest that the concern with communal identity that Rossetti exemplifies throughout *Verses* can be read so as to reflect back typologically, bringing added significance to several of her earlier poems. Throughout 'Divers Worlds,' Rossetti repeatedly utilises the imagery of chimes, vibrations, and bells to figuratively imagine the process of spiritual gazing, echoing, and questioning. The first poem of the sequence begins,

Earth has a clear call of daily bells,  
A chancel-vault of gloom and star,  
A rapture where the anthems are,  
A thunder when the organ swells:  
Alas, man's daily life- what else?-  
Is out of tune with daily bells. (*CP*, p. 473)

---

<sup>26</sup> Nicholas Lossky, 'The Oxford Movement and the Revival of Patristic Theology,' in *From Oxford to the People*, ed. by Paul Vaiss (Hertfordshire: Gracewing, 1996), pp. 76-82 (p. 79).



This verse reads as an almost exact copy of the seventh verse of her earlier, unpublished 1858 poem, “Yet a little while.”

We have a clear call of daily bells,  
A dimness where the anthems are,  
A chancel vault of sky and star,  
A thunder if the organ swells:  
Alas our daily life- what else?-  
Is not in tune with daily bells. (*CP*, p. 805)

By replacing the word ‘dimness’ with ‘rapture’ in her re-working of the verse, Rossetti heightens the drama of the moment of eschatological expectation and changes the associations linked to the word ‘thunder.’ ‘Rapture’ is a word more commonly associated with heaven than with earth. By bringing it into her depiction of the church, she highlights the function of liturgical communion in offering a foretaste of Heaven. Its syntactic and vocal similarities to the word ‘rupture’ heighten its significance, especially considering that it works alongside the ‘thunder’ of the organ (line 4). Noting that the word ‘swells’ is a synonym for Augustine’s term ‘distension,’ the fact that the organ ‘swells’ creating ‘a thunder’ can be seen as illustrative of a stretched temporal identity. However, instead of imagining a rupturing of the individual as earth and heaven converge, Rossetti links the ‘rapture’ of the anthems to the rest and peace of paradise, as described in the second verse of her re-worked poem. With this in mind, the first verse of ‘Earth has a clear call of daily bells’ can be seen to suggest that being in tune with the chimes of the eternal realms means acknowledging the effect of the vibrations of Heaven upon the Saints who reside in the world.

As she uses images of houses, chambers, and palaces to represent individuals, so too does Rossetti use the image of the church building to represent the heavenly community. In her depiction of the church as a sanctuary of peace offering a foretaste of the eternal Temple of God, Rossetti shows it to be

the place most receptive to the urgent calls of God and the vibrations of Heaven. In her discussion of Rossetti's poetic mapping of the sanctity of church space, Emma Mason claims that the chancel screen was the marker of Tractarian return to medieval architecture and a concrete sign of God's hidden position, with the screen cutting off the laity from the altar.<sup>27</sup> Contending that *Verses* can be read, as a 'kind of historical document' and as 'companion piece to Burrows' history of Christ Church,' she suggests that the reader of Rossetti's ritual poetics is able to 'reconstruct' her interest 'in the ritualistic scene so prevalent in Victorian London and in so doing, more clearly perceive her status as a religious commentator as well as poet.'<sup>28</sup> Aligned with the fact that two proponents of the Oxford Movement, Isaac Williams and Augustus Pugin, expressed a keen interest in retaining the chancel screen as they considered the veiling of the consecration of the Host crucial; the sounds of 'rapture' and of 'thunder' that 'Earth has a clear call of daily bells' describes as emerging from the 'chancel-vault' (lines 2-4) take on added significance as they highlight the divide between the laity and the sanctified altar of God.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the 'daily bells' (lines 1, 6) and 'chimes' (lines 7, 12) that announce the correct rhythm of a godly life further emphasise a sense of alienation from the holiness of God. As a continuation of the tolling bells in the previous poem, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (*CP*, p. 472-3), and of the previous section as a whole, 'The World. Self Destruction', these bells and chimes warn of the destruction that will occur in end the times. By conflating these transcendent bells with the daily bells

<sup>27</sup> Emma Mason, 'Religious Intellectuals: The Poetic Gravity of Emily Bronte and Christina Rossetti' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2000), p. 243.

<sup>28</sup> Emma Mason, "'A Sort of Aesthetic-Catholic Revival.' Christina Rossetti and the London Ritualist Scene", in *Outsiders Looking in: The Rossettis Then and Now*, ed. by D. Clifford and L. Roussillon (London: Anthem Press, 2004) pp. 115-130 (p. 126).

<sup>29</sup> G.B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*, (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 254.

of the material church, Rossetti's poem reminds its readers that they still have time to turn to God and encourages them to set themselves spiritually in tune with the chimes of Heaven, re-ordering their eschatological vision from a temporal to an eternal perspective. In the entry preceding the poem's appearance in *Time Flies*, Rossetti contends that the 'twelve solemn days' of Easter have, 'like twelve Sybils arrayed in mourning robes, [...] year by year sounded an alarm throughout the Church's holy mountain; calling on the faithful to bewail the past, amend the present, face the future' (*TF*, March 10; p. 49).

In *The Face of the Deep* Rossetti further emphasises the symbolic link between church bells and alarms when she reflects,

We: born and cut off in time, we must none the less fulfil our eternity; once loaded with the responsibility and can never shift it off, never repudiate our identity, never force our way back into the nothingness whence we emerged. This present temporal stage of our existence is a stage of possibilities, alternatives, hope, fear: that word "never" belongs to our next eternal stage, and ringing the knell of fear rings impartially the knell of hope likewise. (*FD*, p. 102)

Having already noted that 'the hope is in Him, the fear is in ourselves' (*FD*, p. 82), she fervently encourages her readers to grasp the hope offered by the incarnation rather than dwell in fear as they anticipate the second coming. By speaking of the chimes of both hope and fear as a 'knell' she highlights the fact that they are intertwined and exist simultaneously in 'This present temporal stage [...] of possibilities.' The notion that the 'knell' of time is imbued with hope infuses her poem, 'Oh knell of passing time' (*CP*, p. 482) with a positive eschatological slant.

Oh knell of a passing time,  
Will it never cease to chime?  
Oh stir of the tedious sea,  
Will it never cease to be?  
Yea, when night and when day,  
Moon and sun, pass away.

Surely the sun burns low,  
 The moon makes ready to go,  
 Broad ocean ripples to waste,  
 Time is running in haste,  
 Night is numbered, and day  
 Numbered to pass away.

Imitating the insistent chiming of time by the use of a persistent beat and rhyming couplets, Rossetti reinforces her recognition of the imperative need to fully commit oneself to God. In the first verse, the world-weary questions of the speaker disrupt the tripping beat of the rhythm and create anxious pauses which slow down the aural vibrations of the poem. In the second, by ending lines with the words 'go,' 'haste' and 'away' (lines 8, 10, 12), the rhythmic vibrations are restored and lead to the climaxing of the sense of urgency which comes in the final two lines with the repetition of the word 'numbered.' The notion that 'Night is numbered, and day | Numbered to pass away' highlights God's sovereignty over man's smallness and reinforces Rossetti's interpretation of the declaration that 'To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven' (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

In 'Heaven's chimes are slow, but sure to strike at last' (*CP*, p. 484-5), Rossetti builds on the desire she articulates in her earlier poem, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (*CP*, p. 405), when she asks that God would 'sift me thro' (line 6) and emphasises her belief that Heaven's chimes have an impact upon the daily chimes of earth. The second line, 'Earth's sands are slow, but surely dropping thro,' conjures up the image of an hourglass in which one can visualise the disappearance of time. The cultural familiarity of this image is suggested when the speaker of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem, 'The Wreck of

the Deutschland,' takes it up as a metaphor for himself as he speaks of flinging himself 'to the heart of the cross.'<sup>30</sup> He reflects,

I am soft sift  
In an hourglass-at the wall  
Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,  
And it crowds and it combs to the fall. (ibid, lines 25-8)

The idea of being sifted is one which recurs throughout Rossetti's poetry, more often than not, with the connotation of being tested and cleansed. Reflecting an interest in finding a shared identity, her phrase, 'Not many are the numbered sands nor few' (line 6) implicitly alludes to God's promise to Abraham, 'I will [...] make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude' (Genesis 32:12). Read in conjunction with this promise, Rossetti's poem can be seen to suggest that although the passing of time can be noted, no one can predict when the 'time is past' (line 8). Like Abraham's seed, it cannot be counted by human calculation. Considering that 'a thousand years' in God's sight are 'but as yesterday when it is past' (Psalm 90:4), the human terms, 'slow' and 'fast,' are shown to be strictly temporal with no transcendental equivalents.

Perhaps with the image of an hourglass in mind, Augustine writes,

If an instant of time be conceived, which cannot be divided into the smallest particles of moments, that alone is it, which may be called present. Which yet flies with such speed from future to past, as not to be lengthened out with the least stay. For if it be, it is divided into past and future. The present hath no space. (*Confessions*, xi.15.20, p. 236)

The sand, representative of an identity being sifted by God, is mined through so fast that it is impossible to focus on the mid-point, *present*, position. Like the sand, the soul is stretched between past and future and has no temporal solidarity for being. Augustine argues that the sense of solidarity for which we search can

---

<sup>30</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,' line 21, in *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000) pp. 857-863 (p. 858).

only be found in God. There is no space for it on a temporal schema. The rush between past and present is too hectic and fast that no true space for rest or contemplation can be captured. It can only be glimpsed at intervals as the sand in the hourglass may stop only momentarily as it falls.

Reflecting back upon the earlier poems of the sequence, Rossetti's roundel, 'Short is time' (*CP*, p. 486-7), highlights the limitations that time imposes on the individual.

Short is the time, and only time is bleak;  
Gauge the exceeding height thou hast to climb:  
Long eternity is nigh to seek:  
Short is time.

Time is shortening with the wintry rime:  
Pray and watch and pray, girt up and meek:  
Praying, watching, praying, chime by chime.

Pray by silence if thou canst not speak:  
Time is shortening; pray on till the prime:  
Time is shortening: soul, fulfil thy week:  
Short is time.

Preceding its inclusion in *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti encourages her readers with the words,

If here thou must be squeezed or stretched to bring thee into shape, look  
outward and upward to the ensuring amplitude.  
Time is short: long is eternity. (*FD*, p. 505)

A reading of the roundel in conjunction with this encouragement and warning exemplifies the slippages that occur between the prose and poetry throughout Rossetti's corpus. Just as, with its three words, the refrain of the roundel structurally re-enacts the process of shortening, the compact phrase 'Time is short: long is eternity,' with which Rossetti constitutes an entire paragraph, illustrates the shape of 'squeezed or stretched' dimensions of the individual. By articulating the Augustinian idea that the self is uncomfortably 'squeezed or

stretched' in and through time, Rossetti makes repeated allusions to following the chimes of eternity rather the clocks of the world. The fact that chimes, vibrations, and bells form a metonymic pattern throughout the sequence enhances the sense of anticipation that 'Short is the time' conveys. Added to this, the constant repetition of words such as 'praying, watching, praying' (line 7) reinforces the idea of passing time as the clock ticks round and round in a never-ending circle. The encouragement to listen to the vibrations of Heaven which can be heard beyond the pain of earthly existence recalls Jesus' command to keep 'watch [...] for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come' (Matthew 24:42), and emphasises the need to 'fulfil thy week' (line 10) in preparation for the coming of the final and ultimate Sabbath day.

In her 1857 poem, *Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning has Aurora reflect on her relationship with Romney in terms of vibrations and chimes. Through this, she exemplifies the shared familiarity of the peculiarly mid nineteenth-century metaphor of vibrations and chimes to speak of romantic attachments as well as religious convictions. Aurora reflects,

Perhaps we had lived too closely, to diverse  
 So absolutely; leave two clocks, they say,  
 Wound up to different hours, upon one shelf,  
 And slowly, through the interior wheels of each,  
 The blind mechanic motion sets itself  
 A-throb, to feel out for the mutual time.  
 It was not so with us, indeed, While he  
 Struck midnight, I kept striking six at dawn.  
 While he marked judgment, I, redemption day.<sup>31</sup>

Reading the metaphor of two clocks in spiritual terms, Rossetti suggests that, for the believer, the world and the heavens can exist on the same 'shelf.' In many of her earlier poems she writes of God's anguish as he reaches out, in the

---

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (1857), book iv, lines 420-8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 123.

incarnation, to unite the chimes of Heaven and earth. For instance, in ‘Despised and Rejected’ (*CP*, p. 172-174), she has the voice of Christ speak ‘urgently’ (line 38) with tears and blood to the stubborn hermit who ‘makes fast’ (line 5) the door of his being. By utilising imagery overlaid with romantic overtones and by figuring Christ as a passionate lover; rather than participate in the Pre-Raphaelite tendency to spiritualise sexual love, I want to suggest that Rossetti sexualises spiritual love in the pattern of the Song of Songs so as to offer a means of comprehending it.

That the Song of Songs was a key source for Rossetti’s contemplations on the nature of time and eternity can be demonstrated by her repeated mention of it in ‘Divers Worlds.’ Mid-way through the sequence, the roundel, “His Banner over me was Love” (*CP*, p. 480), utilises the imagery of the Old Testament book in its effort to realign the vision of believers with the eternal.

In that world we weary to attain,  
 Love’s furled banner floats at large unfurled:  
 There is no more doubt and no more pain  
 In that world.

There are gems and gold and inlets pearled;  
 There the verdure fadeth not again;  
 There is no clinging tendrils droop uncurled.

Here incessant tides stir up the main,  
 Stormy miry depths aloft are hurled:  
 There is no more sea, or storm, or stain,  
 In that world.

The image of ‘Love’s furled banner’ (line 2) is taken from the Song of Songs 2:4, ‘He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me *was love*’ (italics in the original). It also appears in two of Rossetti’s previous sonnets. ‘After Communion’ (*CP*, p. 222) speaks of Christ as a Friend, King, and Spouse offering protection to his helpless dove under his banner of love and, in ‘All



Saints' (*CP*, p. 731-2), the speaker's mother demonstrates the comfort that can be found in contemplating the reality of the realisation that 'His banner over thee is Love' (line 14). With each reference, Rossetti elaborates on what she understands living as a Christian, embraced and protected by God's timeless love, means. In *Annus Domini*, she likens living under the banner to living within the confines of the commandments and asks Christ to bring 'all men [...] under obedience to Thy Banner, and lead [...] whithersoever Thou wilt' (prayer no. 104). In *Time Flies*, by including "His Banner over me was Love" alongside her reflections on Revelation's image of the 'Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne' leading his people 'unto living fountains of waters, where there shall be no more sea' (November 23; p. 224), she investigates what the release of Love's 'unfurled' (line 2) banner will entail and typologically interprets the Song of Songs through the framework of Christian eschatology.

Beginning with the word 'Beloved' and ending with the reasoning that 'since He makes His garden of thy clod,' each believer should, like the 'lily, rose, or violet,' 'offer up thy sweetness unto God,' Rossetti's following sonnet, 'Beloved yield thy time to God' (*CP*, p. 480-1, lines 12-14) continues to interpret the Song of Songs within a Christian framework. By combining the allusion to Revelation's 'great trumpet sounds' (line 8) with the discourses on divine love as illustrated in the Song of Songs, Rossetti encourages a hopeful rather than fearful contemplation of the final Judgment day: 'It will have a great sound of a trumpet, and the trumpet blast is music [...] it will bring back Christ' (*FD*, p. 82) she writes alongside its inclusion in *The Face of the Deep*.

Revelation 7:14-17 lies at the root of Rossetti's hopeful anticipations of the coming heavenly kingdom:

And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The centrality of Revelation 7 to the nineteenth-century Christian is perhaps best articulated by the words of Bessy Higgins in Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 novel, *North and South*. As she battles with a lung-disease caused by the atrocious conditions of the cotton mill where she was an employee, Bessy tells her sympathetic friend Margaret Hale, 'I read the book o' Revelations until I know it off by heart, and I never doubt [...] all the glory I'm to come to.'<sup>32</sup> Like Bessy, Rossetti channels expressions of world-weariness and frustration into hopeful and sure contemplations of future fulfilment. Contemplating Revelation 7, she writes,

And now the blessed Elder certifies St. John that the uncomforted faithful shall at last be comforted. They shall be delivered from all they ever endured, relived from all they ever suffered. Their emptiness shall be fed and filled. "And God shall wipe away all tears [Revised Version: 'every tear'] from their eyes [sic]." Vast is the consolatoriness, satisfaction, of this revelation. Elsewhere we find rapture, here contentment; elsewhere an overflow, here enough. (FD, p. 237-8)

In 'Divers Worlds,' after establishing the vast 'consolatoriness' and 'satisfaction' that the promises of Revelation offer Christ's disciples, Rossetti introduces the sense of human yearning for the kingdom where 'all tears' will be wiped away. Anticipating the realisation, in "His Banner over me was Love," of the 'that world' where 'There is no more sea, or storm, or stain' (lines 1, 10), in "Whatever is right, that shall ye receive" (CP, p. 475) she speaks the 'separating sea' (line 13) that divides Earth from Heaven. Here, the things of this 'world of

---

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994) p. 117.

hope deferred' (line 9) are depicted as corrupt as a result of fallen human nature. As the speaker laments, 'Here harvests fail, here breaks the heart' (lines 14-15), she looks toward completing the full circle of time and arriving at the ultimate reunion of God and man that will deliver her from a painful existence in 'this thorny scourge' (line 6).

Rossetti continues to explore the chasm that she perceives existing between Earth and Heaven in 'This near-at-hand land breeds pain by measure' (*CP*, p. 475-6). Its speaker begins by offering contrasts between 'this land' that we unhappily inhabit and 'that land' of God which 'overflows with treasure' (lines 1-2). Positioned amongst roundels, it is significant that the poem parallels their structure in that whilst the first line of the poem begins 'This near-at-hand land,' the fourth offers a near-tautological yet seemingly paradoxical reprise, 'Our land that we see.' This slight jarring of the fourth line seems to arise from the sequential positioning of the poem rather than any inherent qualities. However, a consideration of the phrase, 'This near-at-hand land' contributes to this sense of unease since it implicitly reflects the merging of the 'Divers Worlds' of the sequence's title. Whilst the insinuation in this instance is that this 'near-at-hand land' is the one we inhabit, Rossetti refers to the Kingdom of God as a near-at-hand land elsewhere since it remains in sight but is, as yet, unattainable.

After the sharp distinction of the poem from the conventional roundel form in the fourth line, the features of the roundel form emerge more explicitly and Rossetti's idiosyncratic methods of appropriation come to the fore. Comprised of eleven stanzas rather than lines, the key points of poetic movement remain with the first, fourth, and the last. Moving on from a contemplation of the

‘sobbing and sighing’ (line 7) of this land, the poem steadily reaches its climax as, in the fourth stanza, we hear the Angels call ‘Come to our home’ (line 14), and in the last they offer the plea:

Come, where all balm is garnered to ease you;  
Come, where all beauty is spread out to please you;  
Come, gaze upon Jesu.

Kent maintains that the rhyme of this verse was ‘obviously suggested by Herbert’s reconstruction of the name “Jesu” (in the poem of the same name) into “I ease you”’ (“By thought, word, and deed,” p. 261). Indeed, a comparative reading of the two poems brings more similarities to light. For instance, the ‘famine,’ ‘failure’ and ‘fighting’ (line 29) of Rossetti’s speaker corresponds to the affliction that breaks the ‘little frame’ of Herbert’s speaker ‘all to pieces.’<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, a reading of *The Temple: sacred poems and private ejaculations*, reveals more correspondences between Herbert’s own verse and Rossetti’s ‘Divers Worlds’ sequence. Significantly, the trinitarian structure of many of Herbert’s poems provides the impetus behind Rossetti’s own verses. Indeed, by organising ‘This near-at-hand land breeds pain by measure’ into using triplets, Rossetti employs a similar structure to that of Herbert’s ‘Trinity Sunday’ (Herbert, p. 61). It begins,

Lord, who hast formed me out of mud,  
And hast redeemed me through thy blood,  
And sanctified me to do good;

Through the correspondence of each line to the various aspects of the Trinity; God the creator, Christ the redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier, Herbert is able formally to expound on the structure of the trinitarian personhood

---

<sup>33</sup> George Herbert, *The Temple: sacred poems and private ejaculations* in *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, ed. by John Tobin (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2004), p. 104.

bestowed on each individual. By using Herbert's tight structure as a means through which to articulate the struggle to grasp the reality of this trinitarian personhood, Rossetti exemplifies the discipline needed to reach the place where the believer can 'Come, gaze upon Jesu.'

The journey from brokenness and temporal despair to heavenly joy is articulated through the figuration of the sea in the group of three poems that follow. In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti suggests that the sea was 'originally constituted as a passage, not as an abode: across it men toiled in rowing to the haven where he would be, but itself never was and never could be that haven' (*FD*, p. 478). The notion that the sea can never match the 'haven' of God is highlighted in the 'laments' and the 'wail of loss' with which it is characterised in "Was Thy Wrath against the Sea?" (*CP*, p. 476-7, lines 1-2). Its title is derived from Habakkuk's prayer that God may manifest his wrath and mercy:

Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. (Habakkuk 3:8-10)

By making poetic reference to the plague of the Nile (Exodus 7:20-24), the stopping of the Jordan (Joshua 3:15-17), and the parting of the Dead Sea (Exodus 14:15-31), Habakkuk exemplifies a particular typology of the Old Testament which demonstrates the unity of God's providential workings. In her poem, Rossetti takes the figurative reading of history in which Habakkuk participates to a different, Christianised, dimension:

The sea laments with unappeasable  
Hankering wail of loss,  
Lifting its hands on high and passing by  
Out of the lovely light:

No foambow any more may crest that swell  
 Of clamorous waves which toss;  
 Lifting its hands on high it passes by  
 From light into the night.  
 Peace, peace, thou sea! God's wisdom worketh well,  
 Assigns it crown or cross:  
 Lift we all hands on high, and passing by  
 Attest: God doeth right.

In addition to relating Habakkuk's prayer (with all its typological inferences) to Revelation 21:2 ('and there was no more sea'), Rossetti uses the words which constitute the turning point of the poem, 'Peace, peace, thou sea' (line 9), to recall Jesus' calming of the storm (Matthew 8:23-27). Like Habakkuk, the disciples in the boat plead 'Lord, save us: we perish', and like him, they come to the realisation that 'God doeth right' (line 12) as they recognise that 'even the winds and the sea obey Him!' (Matthew 8:27, Mark 4:41). In her discussion of the rhetoric of the poem, Constance Hassett writes that

When the third quatrain complements the second with a full set of exact matches, the satisfaction of hearing the words themselves work "well" encourages acceptance of the thought that "God's wisdom worketh well." With the final line's solemn command, "Attest: God doeth right," the language itself sounds biblically and acoustically "right," an echo of Herbert's technique when he ends "Denial" with the phrase "and mend my rhyme." If the poem succeeds it is because of the skill that brings the prophet's text into Rossetti's own and then, by subduing strong rhymes, mimes the bringing of restless emotions to order.<sup>34</sup>

Following Hassett's argument, I want to suggest that the practice of structurally conflating, not just one, but several biblical texts is central to Rossetti's typology. By using rhythm as a tool through which to make her confluences sound 'biblically and acoustically "right,"' rather than merely 'bringing [...] restless emotions to order,' she invites each individual reader to insert themselves into the biblical schema.

---

<sup>34</sup> Constance W. Hassett, *Christina Rossetti: The Patience of Style* (London; Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), p. 207-8.

Rossetti explores the process of active insertion and offers a further consideration of the journey to heaven that each believer is invited to make in “And there was no more Sea.”

Voices from above and from beneath,  
Voices of creation near and far,  
Voices out of life and out of death,  
Out of measureless space,  
Sun, moon, star,  
In oneness of contentment offering praise.

Heaven and earth and sea jubilant,  
Jubilant all things that dwell therein;  
Filled to fullest overflow they chant,  
Still roll onward, well,  
Still begin,  
Never flagging praise interminable.

Thou who must fall silent in a while,  
Chant thy sweetest, gladdest, best, at once;  
Sun thyself today, keep peace and smile;  
By love upward send  
Orisons,  
Accounting love thy lot and love thine end. (*CP*, p. 477)

Here, the figuration in “Was Thy Wrath against the Sea?” of worshippers, imitating the pattern of the sea as ‘it lifts its hands on high’ (lines 3,7) and attesting that their God ‘worketh well’ and doeth right’ (lines 9, 12) is clearly illustrated. The poem proclaims that ‘In oneness of contentment’ (line 6), the patient saints offer their praise. By depicting their ‘chant’ (lines 9, 14) in terms of the ‘overflow,’ the ‘roll,’ and the ‘Never flagging’ (lines 9, 10, 12) pattern of the rhythmic and regular waves of the sea, Rossetti offers her own contemplation of the ‘sea of glass’ that St. John describes surrounding the Throne of God (Revelation 4:6). By varying the line lengths throughout, she structurally incorporates the ‘roll’ (line 10) of the waves into her verse and presents a visual as well as acoustic sea-like patterning.

In the final verse, by making the single word ‘Orisons’ (line 17) the axis upon which every other line is based, she highlights the relational basis upon which God and man are to be understood. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an ‘orison’ is ‘The action or practice of praying.’<sup>35</sup> In chapter three I will move onto explore Rossetti’s engagement with orisons in more depth. Here, however, I want to observe that along with her reference to ‘today’ (line 15) and her use of the present tense, she utilises the word ‘orisons’ as a verb to firmly position the words of her poem in the existential present where individuals remain in the process of reaching a more intimate knowledge of God and of their trinitarian constitution.

In *The Face of the Deep*, the commentary that precedes the poem’s inclusion reinforces the idea that the sea is very much a product of the present time. Considering Revelation 16:3 which reads, ‘And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea’, Rossetti reflects that, ‘Perhaps this prominent connection of the sea with death prepares us for its mysterious exclusion from the new heaven and the new earth’ (FD, P. 385). Contrasting the present troubled seas of this world to the ‘sea of glass’ that John envisages as encompassing the Throne in the New Heaven, she reflects,

However fathomless its depths, its surface (the thought is not my own) appears as a vast permanent mirror; reflecting all which surrounds it. It thus recalls Habakkuk’s prophetic promise: “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” So here in the better land we perceive a figure of that which (God willing) will convey to the redeemed a perfect knowledge of God Himself, and of each fellow saint who abode the day of His coming and stood when He appeared. (FD, p. 156)

---

<sup>35</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [Accessed 30 June 2008]



Aligning Revelation's 'sea of glass' (Revelation 4:6 and 15:2) with perfect knowledge of God and of the self, and likening it to a 'vast permanent mirror', she recalls Paul's proclamation that 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known' (1 Corinthians 13:2). By placing in parenthesis the conditional disclaimer, '(God willing),' she acknowledges the uncertainty that, she believes, remains with the individual in the face of divine mercy. In her 'Divers Worlds' sequence, she reinforces the fact that, like her devotional prose, her poetry is spoken from a place of trust in God rather than herself. By ending the poem, "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive," with the line, 'All one in Christ, so one – (please God!)—with me' (line 16), she highlights her belief that all her insecurities stem from a distrust of herself rather than a distrust of God.

In her roundel, 'Roses on a brier' (*CP*, p. 477-8), Rossetti's speaker uses the biblical phrase, 'there shall be no more sea' as a refrain in order that her 'long desire' and 'passionate heart' be 'stilled' (lines 7-9). By repeating the rhyme 'brier' (lines 1, 5) and 'desire' (lines 3, 7), before speaking of having to 'earn thy part' (line 11), she conflates spiritual longing with anguish and persecution. In Revelation 21:1-4, John's vision of the disappearance of the sea comes as he is given a glimpse of a time when there will no longer be any separation between God and man. In her poem, by transferring John's words from the communal to the individual level, Rossetti demonstrates her adherence to Augustine's concern with tracing the eschatological conflict in the human soul and reinforces her insistence that each individual is responsible for the progress of their own spiritual journey. In *The Face of the Deep*, she recognises 'I cannot unself myself' (p. 47) and, in *Annus Domini* she writes that we can never 'repudiate our

identity, never force our way back into the nothingness whence we emerged' (prayer no. 102). Believers must therefore, she insists, avoid entering the state of 'distension' described by Augustine and move upwards and embrace the huge personal responsibility with which, as individuals constituting the Communion of Saints, each has been endowed. 'Make me such' as they that 'endure' she had prays in the second poem of the sequence, "Escape to the Mountain" (lines 11-12). As the sequence continues, Rossetti suggests that this process of being made a saint and reaching the promised state of fulfilment and completion is an intensely painful one beset with trials that the individual can only overcome by divine grace.

In "Then whose shall those things be?" (*CP*, p. 480), Rossetti considers the painful process of corresponding to the rhythm of God's chimes when she asks why, with the reassurance and with the promise of ultimate comfort to come, 'we' should seek to 'build' and 'heap up' our treasures here on earth (lines 3-4). Taken from the parable of the rich man who 'layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God' (Luke 12:16-21), the title reinforces the insistent call of *Verses* to redeem the time and take the path of divine love. The urgency of this call is emphasised further by the warning in the closing line, 'step by step Death nears the door.' Preceding its inclusion in *Time Flies*, Rossetti alludes to the cost of actively choosing God's kingdom rather than the world's when she speaks of a friend who, upon exhibiting prints from the Book of Job, 'avowed herself afraid to look at a representation which went counter to the Second Commandment, and looked not at it' (April 15; p. 71).

In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti emphasises the eternal significance of looking, gazing, and watching in her analysis of the words of Revelation 3:3, 'If

therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what I hour will come upon thee.' She writes that 'In whatever mood, in depression if need be, let us watch,' and stresses that the very act of 'our watchfulness' can ensure eternal salvation (p. 90). In her sonnet, 'Babylon the Great' (*CP*, p. 470), which is also included in the latter part of *Verses*, Rossetti reinforces these ideas as the hints at the significance of the act of watching and gazing. Its sestet reads,

Gaze not upon her, for her dancing whirl  
Turns giddy the fixed gazer presently:  
Gaze not upon her, lest thou be as she  
When, at the far end of her long desire,  
Her scarlet vest and gold and gem and pearl  
And she amid her pomp are set on fire. (lines 9-14)

Before the inclusion of the sonnet in *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti alludes to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and writes of how the Pilgrim 'dreamed of a woman stammering, squinting, lame of foot, maimed of hands, and ashy pale. He gazed on her [...] and under his gaze her form straightened, her faced flushed, and her song loosened to the Siren's song' (p. 406). Rossetti's depiction of this incident is taken directly from her sister Maria's retelling of Dante's pilgrimage through Purgatory wherein she recalls how singing of the foul woman captivates the pilgrim and holds him entranced until a saintly lady, 'probably Lucia or Illuminating Grace,' appears and rouses Virgil to go to his aid. Virgil then rips open the woman's garment to reveal her belly, the stench from which breaks the 'spell' and startles the pilgrim from his dream.<sup>36</sup> Like this foul woman, Rossetti writes that the woman of Revelation may 'be studied as illustrating the particular foulness, degradation, loathsomeness, to which a perverse rebellious woman because feminine not masculine is liable' (*FD*, p. 400).

---

<sup>36</sup> Maria Francesca Rossetti, *A Shadow of Dante* (London: Rivingtons, 1871), p. 162.

The notion that the transfixed gazer is liable to become ‘as she’ (line 10), the foul creature of Revelation 17 serves to emphasise the epistemological link between transfiguration and gazing. In her discussion of the fluidity of identity, Teresa Brennan challenges the conception that, unlike the other senses, sight leaves the boundaries of the individual relatively intact and voices the possibility that visual encounters cause changes in the pheromones each person emanates. By suggesting that the ‘gazer’ is liable to be ‘turned ‘giddy’ (line 10) by the spectacle of the Whore of Babylon, Rossetti anticipates Brennan’s critique of the notion that sight can be perceived as pure and as ‘the sense that separates, where the other senses do not.’<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps appropriately, after contemplating the confusion of the distended soul in the transient world and the significance of avoiding gazing at what is spiritually detrimental, Rossetti begins “There remaineth therefore a Rest to the People of God” (*CP*, p. 485) with the words ‘Rest remains when all is done.’ The title is taken from Hebrews 4:9 which reasons that since God ‘did rest the seventh day from all his works’ (4:4), so too should His people ‘labour [...] to enter into that rest’ (4:11). However, whereas God rested from his work of creating the heavens and the earth, the author of Hebrews suggests that it is the duty of the believer to find rest in the cross of Christ. Revelation 14:13 alludes to this rest and the blessing provided by Christ’s sacrifice when it states, ‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.’ In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti reads the verse typologically as she writes that it reminds her ‘of the Manifestation of the Divine Trinity at our Lord’s Baptism, and again (?)

---

<sup>37</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 10-11.

[sic] at His Paternal Fountain-head of Blessing; and refers that Blessing to union with the Son, the Spouse of souls' (*FD*, p. 363). It is the hope of union with the Trinity that enables the speaker of the poem to encourage the reader to continue battling with the 'here and the burden' of the present time. Like the saints in "All Flesh is Grass" (*CP*, p. 484), who exist beyond 'time's measure' (line 20), in "There remaineth" Rossetti voices a 'fear' and a 'hope' (line 6) that one day, all the 'struggling' and 'panting' (line 10) that believers are forced to do whilst still living in the world will be rewarded. The 'panting' of the last line of "There remaineth" is implicitly related to the 'parting' of the next poem, 'Parting after parting' (*CP*, p. 485). This poem speaks of the ache of living on earth where relationships are necessarily cut short by death and followed by 'loss and gnawing pain' (line 2). By contrasting the agony of life 'in time' (line 9) to existence in 'eternity' where pain 'shall not be' (line 6), Rossetti heightens the sense of anticipation that she had been developing in her previous poems.

This anticipation comes to a climax in the grouping of the five roundels that end the sequence (*CP*, p. 486-7). Focusing on the finality of earthly existence and the ascent to heaven, in these poems, Rossetti seeks to move the reader away from a concern with her individuality and towards a concern with maintaining communion with God. The first two roundels are encompassed into one poem, "They put their trust in Thee, and were not confounded." Derived from David's exclamation: 'They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded' (Psalm 22: 5), the title given in *Verses* does not appear in *Time Flies* where the poem was first published (*TF*, October 15 and 16; p. 199). Nonetheless, the fact that it appears among entries relating to the 'sundering' sea of the present and encouragements to believers to put their

trust in the eternal and not trust in their own faculties but in the perfection of God's character, augments the sense of comfort offered in the relation that can be achieved between the soul and God (ibid.). With the addition of the title, however, the focus is shifted. In the articulation of doubt in the first roundel, as the speaker asks whether she will ever again enjoy the perfect union of love she 'hungered' (i, line 10) for on earth, the sense of uncertainty that David felt as he desperately sought for answers can be seen to be reflected. The first lines of the roundel reflect the uncertainties that the believer is so often beset with.

Together once, but never more  
While Time and Death run out their runs:  
Tho' sundered now as shore from shore  
Together once. (lines 1-4)

A sense of completion and final understanding is established through the repetitive rhyme scheme and tightly structured metre offering a creative typological interpretation of David's cry in the first lines of Psalm 22.

My God, my God, look upon me; why hast thou forsaken me: And art so far from my health, and from the words of my complaint? O my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not: and in the night-season also I take no rest. And thou continuest holy: O thou worship of Israel. (Psalm 22:1-2)

As recurrent with the roundel form, scriptural phrases are returned to again and again. In the second roundel, a Christological interpretation is brought to the Psalm as the speaker uses the refrain to reassure herself that it is not for her to worry 'whatso it be' (ii, lines 1, 4, 11). Why are we to groan and doubt, she asks when God 'guides the wren' and 'guards the shifty mouse' (ii, lines 8-9). If, as Jesus claims, God is able to feed the 'fowls of the air' and clothe the 'lilies of the field' she reasons that there can be no doubt that he is able to meet the deepest needs of each individual (Matthew 6:25-33/ Luke 12:22-31). Indeed, by making Christ's promises the focal point of 'Divers Worlds,' Rossetti encourages a

reader based typology whereby time is increasingly aligned with an eternal perspective. However, as I will continue to demonstrate, this alignment cannot be mapped as a linear or spatial journey but must rather be understood in terms of the soul's painful and circumstantial ascent towards New Jerusalem.

By concluding the 'Divers Worlds' sequence with the two roundels that she used to end *The Face of the Deep*, 'For Each' and 'For All' (CP, p. 487), Rossetti articulates this ascent as she traces the move away from an individual and towards a communal spiritual identity and reinforces the premise that, although painful, such a move leads to an enhanced realisation of one's trinitarian personhood. Whilst the refrain of the first reads, 'My harvest is done,' the second reads, 'Man's harvest is past.' By speaking of the struggle she faced as she wended up 'the narrow way' (line 8) and shunned the 'snares and pits' (line 9) of the world in her struggle to reach heaven, the speaker of 'For Each' depicts the Christian journey as the individual's steep and lonely climb to God. In 'For All' however, 'each soul' (line 10) is depicted as waiting in a community for the 'call of the trumpet blast' (line 9). Anticipating the use of these roundels to end *The Face of the Deep* and the 'Divers World' sequence; in *Time Flies*, after the daily reflections and before the Appendix, Rossetti includes a roundel written in a place of waiting among the community of Saints. Also used to conclude *Verses*, 'Looking back along life's trodden way' (TF, December 31; p. 253/ CP, p. 543) alludes to the painful ascent to Heaven and the rest that lies in store for the weary pilgrim. Noting that the cloud she once considered 'black' (line 6) now appears harmonized among its surroundings, the speaker recalls the 'mist' that fades in 'I lift mine to eyes to see' (line 7) and encourages the envisioning of hardships from the perspective of the Community of Saints in

eternity rather than from that of the lonely pilgrims in the transient world.

Similarly, in 'For All,' by looking forward to the time when 'each soul' will reach its 'goal' (lines 9, 10), Rossetti combines encouragement with a 'call' to set oneself right before God before 'all lots are cast' (lines 9, 7).

It is Rossetti's correlation of time with the process of the 'set[ing] oneself right before God' that, I wish to argue, gives shape and meaning to the 'Divers Worlds' sequence. Following Augustine's suggestion that, like oil and water, souls 'are urged by their own weights to seek their own places,' she repeatedly speaks of the believer's journey through the temporal realms and towards the eternal. Positing that 'rest' can be found in the 'patient pause' between earth and Heaven ('Earth has a clear call, lines 8, 7), she suggests that the realm of time vibrates with God's presence. By incorporating biblical phrases and echoes of liturgical practices into her poetry, she demonstrates a concern to overcome temporal boundaries and integrate herself and her readers into the Communion of Saints which responds to divine vibrations and exists in 'oneness of contentment' ("And there was no more Sea," line 6). As this chapter has indicated, this process of integration dissolves the boundaries between earth and Heaven and reconceptualises the dynamic interaction between time and eternity recurrent that is recurrent throughout Rossetti's poetics.



## Chapter 2: The Identity of the Bride of Christ

In their 2006 article, ‘Rossetti and the Tractarians,’ Diane D’Amico and David Kent argue that ‘more work on Rossetti’s treatment of the Virgin Mary within the context of the Oxford Movement’s response to the mother of Jesus needs to be done.’<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I offer a response to this need as I consider Rossetti’s articulation of what it means to emulate the obedience, humility, and courage of the Virgin Mary in the process of transforming oneself into a member of the Bride of Christ or Communion of Saints. Investigating how Rossetti reads both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene as types of Eve and as antitypes to the nineteenth-century Christian, I demonstrate how her understanding of each is neither strictly typological nor a continuation of established doctrinal patterns. Instead, I illustrate how her interpretations of Scripture often move beyond those of her contemporaries in the Oxford Movement, subverting traditional interpretations and enlarging the narrow polarised categories in which the two women have so often been confined. Discussing her conflation of both Marys as types of the Song of Songs’ Beloved and as representatives of the individual Christian, I demonstrate the various ways through which Rossetti narrows the chasm that had been established between the conceptions of the pure bride and the female sinner. My focus is particularly on how she uses the figure of the Virgin Mary to encourage each believer, regardless of gender, to develop a self-perception based on the process of *becoming* part of the wider body of the Communion of Saints. Following this, I consider how Rossetti utilises works

---

<sup>1</sup> Diane D’Amico, and David Kent, ‘Rossetti and the Tractarians,’ *Victorian Poetry*, 44 (2006), 93-103 (p. 101).

with Tractarian, Roman Catholic, patristic and medieval sources in order to figure the nun as a representative of this process.

### **i. The Typological Realisation of the Virgin Mary**

One of the central concerns of Tractarian theologians was with emphasising the devotional significance of the liturgical year. By shaping the third sequence of *Verses*, 'Some Feasts and Fasts,' around the pattern set by the ecclesiastical calendar in the Prayer Book, Rossetti demonstrates her adherence to this concern. In his analysis of John Keble's 1827 volume, *The Christian Year*, G.B Tennyson suggests that the best way to understand it as a Tractarian work 'is to see it in relation to the worship it was designed to enhance.' This, he argues, demands a consideration 'of its most visible, and most overlooked feature- its subordination to the liturgical year generally and to the Book of Common Prayer specifically.'<sup>2</sup> D'Amico and Mary Arseneau both discuss the illustrations and marginalia that can be seen in Rossetti's copy of *The Christian Year* and suggest that she turned to the book for spiritual comfort and guidance.<sup>3</sup> By considering 'Some Feasts and Fasts' in relation to the practice of worship it encourages and the intonations of Anglican liturgy it propounds, I wish to highlight the underlying practical theology that can be gleaned from understanding it in conjunction with the Book of Common Prayer. Unlike *The Christian Year*, which follows the exact pattern set by the ecclesiastical calendar, I want to suggest that by aligning itself more

---

<sup>2</sup> G.B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*, (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Diane D'Amico, 'Christina Rossetti's *Christian Year*: Comfort for 'the Weary Heart', *Victorian Newsletter*, 72 (1987), 36-42 (p. 36); Mary Arseneau, 'Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and Goblin Market', *Victorian Poetry*, 31 (1993), 79-93 (p. 79).

*loosely* with the Book of Common Prayer, 'Some Feasts and Fasts' brings to the fore the cyclical structure and the typological implications of the Christian devotional year.

That the identity of the Virgin Mary has been a problem for the Church of England from its very conception can be demonstrated by a consideration of her place in the Book of Common Prayer. In 1561, by affirming the celebration of five feast days associated with her person (the Annunciation, her visit to Elizabeth, her purification, her birth, and her conception) but choosing not to include the feast of the Assumption in its calendar, the church made a radical departure from Roman Catholic doctrine and highlighted its concern to avoid honouring the mother over the son. The authors of the 2004 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, recognise the problematic position of the figure of Mary for the church and seek to remedy the entrenched polarisation that has developed between Roman Catholics and Anglicans regarding Marian doctrine. Introducing their enquiry, they write,

We have asked to what extent doctrine or devotion concerning Mary belongs to a legitimate 'reception' of the apostolic Tradition, in accordance to the Scriptures. This Tradition has at its core the proclamation of the trinitarian 'economy of salvation,' grounding the life and faith of the Church in the divine communion of Father, Son and Spirit. We have sought to understand Mary's person and role in the history of salvation and the life of the Church in the light of a theology of divine grace and hope. Such theology is deeply rooted in the enduring experience of Christian worship and devotion.<sup>4</sup>

Anticipating their concern to place the Virgin Mary firmly within the trinitarian 'economy of salvation' and find, what John Henry Newman terms, the *Via Media*, or 'the middle way' between Roman Catholic and Anglican dogma, the

---

<sup>4</sup> *Mary: Grace and Hope and Christ, The Seattle Statement: Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission* (ARCIC II: 2004), <<http://www.ecumenism.net>> [accessed 22 February 2008], paragraph 4 of 80.

Tractarians look repeatedly to the writings of the Patristic Fathers.<sup>5</sup> It is her engagement with the Tractarian concern to adhere to the model of looking back to the 'legitimate 'reception' of the apostolic Tradition, in accordance with the Scriptures' that, I want to argue, determines Rossetti's poetic treatment of Mary. Emphasising that their theology is 'deeply rooted in the enduring experience of Christian worship and devotion,' the authors of the ARCIC document note that 'Anglican liturgy, as expressed in the successive Books of Common Prayer (1549, 1552, 1559, 1662) when it mentions Mary gives prominence to her role as the 'pure Virgin' from whose 'substance' the Son took human nature.' They claim that

In spite of the diminution of devotion to Mary in the sixteenth century, reverence for her endured in the continued use of the *Magnificat* in Evening Prayer, and the unchanged dedication of ancient churches and Lady Chapels. In the seventeenth century writers such as Lancelot Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor and Thomas Ken re-appropriated from patristic tradition a fuller appreciation of the place of Mary in the prayers of the believer and of the Church. (ARCIC, paragraph 46)

Examining her emblematic tendencies, Gisela Honnighausen suggests that by finding 'inspiration [...] in seventeenth-century examples of devotional writing,' Rossetti was 'following a general trend.'<sup>6</sup> As I continue to explore the dynamics of Rossetti's typological interpretations, I wish move beyond the notion that Rossetti was simply 'following' the general trend initiated by her Tractarian counterparts and argue that she herself engaged creatively with 'writers such as Lancelot Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor and Thomas Ken' and thereby contributed to the ongoing re-appropriation of the patristic tradition.

---

<sup>5</sup> John Henry Newman, 'Introduction,' *Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church: Via Media*, i (1837; 1838; 1877), in *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, ed. by H.D. Weidner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

<sup>6</sup> Gisela Honnighausen, 'Emblematic Tendencies in the Works of Christina Rossetti', *Victorian Poetry*, 10 (1972), 1-15 (p. 3).

In the introduction to his collection, *Medieval Preachers and Medieval Preaching*, John Mason Neale criticises the detached approach to the Bible that developed in eighteenth-century Europe. He argues that the calendar of the Church ‘is not the mere reciter of events which happened centuries ago, nor their expounder, nor, as the Puritans would have it, their *improver*’ (italics in the original). Rather, he suggests, ecclesiastical ritual serves to set the events

forth before the eyes of man as if they were now happening; as if they were scenes in which we ourselves were taking a part; as if they were events occurring in our own times, and in which we bore a living interest. The Church would not represent to us the cycle of events in our LORD’S Life and Death, as if they had occurred, once for all, eighteen centuries ago; but would have us regard them as if they happened again and again every year, and were occurrences to which we should look forward, rather than look back. This characteristic remains very strongly impressed on our own Prayer Book: where, before each recurring Festival, we pray in some sort that the event may happen, as a future thing, which we are really commemorating as a past occurrence. Thus, for example, on the Sunday after Ascension, the Church, as if forgetful that the Day of Pentecost is really past, prays, in the same words that the Apostles might have used during the actual ten days which succeeded our LORD’S Ascension, “We beseech Thee, leave us not comfortless; but send to us Thine HOLY GHOST to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whiter our SAVIOUR CHRIST has gone before.”<sup>7</sup>

Following this, he encourages his ‘brethren’ to try for themselves whether, ‘by a little study’ of the patristic and medieval writers whom the seventeenth century divines ‘Andrewes, and Donne, and Cosin, had in their hearts and memories, their own discourses would not be improved’ (p. lxxvii).

In his own ‘study,’ Neale compares typical examples of early nineteenth-century exegesis with the mystical hermeneutical practices of medieval theologians and notes that whereas

With Bishop Horsley [...] the Nativity is regarded as an event which occurred many centuries ago, in order that it might be “improved,” and

---

<sup>7</sup> John Mason Neale, *Medieval Preachers and Medieval Preaching: A series of extracts, translated from the sermons of the middle ages* (London: J. & C. Mozley, 1856), p. lvii-lviii.

made matter of edifying discourse now; with Abbat Guarric it is a present reality; as present to himself as to the shepherds to whom the angels first announced the glad tidings of great joy which should be to all people. (Neale, *Medieval Preachers*, p. lx)

In ‘Some Feasts and Fasts,’ by taking possession of the practices of mystical hermeneutics, following the Church calendar given in the Prayer Book, and dramatising the process of understanding the events of the Bible as occurrences which recur in the present, Rossetti merges self-articulation with scriptural language. For instance, she narrates ‘Epiphany’ (*CP*, p. 425-6) through the voice of a wise man, she echoes Peter’s lament in ‘St. Peter once’ (*CP*, p. 448-9) and, in ‘I followed Thee, my God’ (*CP*, p. 449-50), she has her narrator gain spiritual insight and confidence in aligning herself with ‘the scorned thief who hangs by Thee’ (line 51).

Following the example set by Abbat Gurric in regarding the Nativity as ‘a present reality,’ in her poem, ‘Feast of the Annunciation’ (*CP*, p. 446), Rossetti suggests that each believer should pray following the pattern initiated by the angel Gabriel.

Whereto shall we liken this Blessed Mary Virgin,  
 Fruitful shoot from Jesse’s root graciously emerging?  
 Lily we might call her, but Christ alone is white;  
 Rose delicious, but that Jesus is the one delight;  
 Flower of women, but her Firstborn is mankind’s one flower:  
 He the Sun lights up all moons through their radiant hour.  
 “Blessed among women, highly favoured,” thus  
 Glorious Gabriel hailed her, teaching words to us:  
 Whom devoutly copying we too cry “All hail!”  
 Echoing on the music of glorious Gabriel.

By imitating the liturgical pattern of declaration and response, and by using the words ‘we’ (lines 1, 3, 9) and ‘us’ (line 8) in conjunction with references to ‘call[ing]’ (line 3), ‘hail[ing]’ (line 9), and ‘music’ (line 10), Rossetti constructs ‘Feast of the Annunciation’ in an ecclesiastical framework and emphasises the

centrality of divine communion to an understanding of the dynamics of the eternal schema.

In addition to utilising a liturgical pattern, the poem's alternating lines of iambic hexameter and iambic heptameter, its insistent rhyming couplets, and its use of internal rhyme and repetition, mean that it can be aligned with the rhythmic communal chanting that was having a resurgence in high-Anglican congregations. Indeed, alongside its ecclesiastical features, it recalls the language of the established collect for the Feast of the Annunciation.

We beseech thee, Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known Christ thy Son's incarnation, by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord.<sup>8</sup>

Stella Brook describes collects as 'short prayers which [...] collect or gather up the petitions of the several members of the congregation into a single prayer' and notes that they are constructed on a 'definite plan.' In both Latin and English collects, she writes that 'the patterned construction of the prayer tends to be reinforced by verbal patterning.'<sup>9</sup> Considering the influence of ecclesiastical chanting alongside the verbal patterning of the collect for the Feast of the Annunciation, Rossetti's suggestion that the worship of the believer is 'Echoing on the music of glorious Gabriel' (line 10) can be read as an expression of God pouring 'grace into our hearts' and enabling the dialogic intercourse between the individual and the divine.

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer, and administration of the sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England: together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in churches* (Manchester: T. Allen, 1799), p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> Stella Brook, *The Language of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd, 1965), p. 128-9.

Considering the properties of echoes, Isobel Armstrong suggests that they ‘collect, resound, are aggregative, ululations sent outwards by the voice.’<sup>10</sup> In terms of Rossetti’s poem, the notion that echoes are ‘aggregative’ pertains to the ‘we’ that unites and collectively copies the ‘music of glorious Gabriel’ (line 10). Indeed, the ‘verbal patterning’ of the communal voice of the poem serves as a link to the words of the collect, ‘We beseech thee [...] we have known [...] we may be brought.’ According to Tennyson, *The Christian Year* ‘takes much of its coloration and force from its setting and from the devotional attitude of the rightly disposed reader’ (Tennyson, p. 93). Similarly, the full realisation of the meaning of Rossetti’s ‘Feast of the Annunciation’ depends upon the devotional response of its readers. As I will continue to demonstrate, the notion that the individual becomes united with the wider Communion of Saints as she responds to God in liturgy is particularly emphasised throughout *Verses*.

Whereas, in ‘Some Feasts and Fasts,’ Rossetti entitles the poem ‘Feast of the Annunciation’; in *Time Flies*, she includes it under her meditation for September 8<sup>th</sup>, the ‘Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.’ In the commentary preceding its inclusion, she resolves the difficulty of naming the ‘Blessed Mary Virgin’ (line 1) by focusing not on her but on the Incarnation of Christ.

“Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh.”

Since it pleased God to regard “the lowliness of His Handmaiden,” well may we regard her with loving reverence. (*TF*, September 8; p. 173-4).

By conflating 1 Timothy 3:16 with the words of the Magnificat, Rossetti reinforces the Tractarian practice of considering Mary in terms of Jesus’

---

<sup>10</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford, Blackwell: 2000), p. 252.



humanity.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, she highlights the trinitarian core of her understanding when she insists that God the Father ‘was manifest in the flesh’ of Christ the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. In her poem, by introducing the echoing response to Gabriel’s cry with the inference that ‘He the Sun lights up all moons through their radiant hour’ (line 6), she implicitly suggests that it is the same Holy Spirit who works through Mary that enables ‘all’ believers to reflect back to God his own divine radiance. By positioning the Virgin as an authentic mirror of Jesus, and as a pattern of humility for all disciples regardless of their gender, Rossetti honours Mary whilst avoiding Mariolatry, which, according to William Sharp, she envisioned as the ‘most cardinal error’ of the Church of Rome.<sup>12</sup>

That Mariolatry was a huge issue in the mid nineteenth century can be demonstrated by the fact that many prominent Anglo-Catholics were, after his denominational conversion in 1845, following Newman into the Roman Catholic Church and proclaiming their fervent devotion to the Virgin. Investigating this revival in Marian devotion, Kimberly VanEsveld Adams speaks of the extravagant Mariolatry of the newly converted Roman Catholic Frederick W. Faber and notes the popularity of his teaching as evidenced by the sales figures of his 1853 book, *All for Jesus*.<sup>13</sup> I want to suggest that, as she developed as a theologian, Rossetti reacted to this fervent Mariolatry, and to the mid-century shift to Rome that many of her fellow Tractarians were making, by an increased adherence to a particularly Anglican hermeneutics which, basing itself on

---

<sup>11</sup> By referring to ‘the lowliness of His Handmaiden,’ the Magnificat appropriates the words of Luke 1:48, ‘the low estate of His Handmaiden.’

<sup>12</sup> William Sharp, “Some Reminiscences of Christina Rossetti,” *Atlantic Monthly* 75 (June 1895) p. 745, quoted in Diane D’Amico, *Faith Gender and Time* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), p. 183.

<sup>13</sup> Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: the Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001) p. 22.

apostolic models, was rooted in a theology which was primarily practical and salvational.

Amongst the leaders of the Oxford Movement, it appears that Isaac Williams' interpretation of the position of the Virgin Mary comes closest to Rossetti's own. Introducing her 1879 book, *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite*, Rossetti claims, 'In writing the following pages, when I have consulted a Harmony it has been that of the late Rev. Isaac Williams' (*SF*, p. 3). Williams' *Harmony of the Four Evangelists* offers a typological template for the parallel columns of Bible verses in *Seek and Find* in that it positions gospel passages alongside one another to make one coherent narrative, thus highlighting the unity of Scripture.<sup>14</sup> In the commentary that he wrote alongside this Harmony, Williams demonstrates a concern to avoid Mariolatry. Whilst he establishes his reverent approach to the Virgin Mary, he is careful to take a firm stance against the worship of her that his former Tractarian associates, Newman, Faber, and William Dodsworth were beginning to practice. He writes,

Behold the handmaid of the Lord, that is to say, one that is His and not her own. All thought of self is lost in God, there is no reflection of herself, but as belonging to Him, as His property, His handmaid and servant; having no will but His will; as passive in Him. There is no instance of ready obedience, of devout acquiescence, of entire resignation on record more beautiful than this.<sup>15</sup>

In 'Some Feasts and Fasts,' Rossetti repeatedly adheres to this doctrine that 'there is no reflection' of Mary herself 'but as belonging to Him.' However, she takes her investigation beyond that of Williams and into more universal

---

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Williams, *A Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1850).

<sup>15</sup> Isaac Williams, 'Our Lord's Nativity,' *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative*, 8 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1891), iii, p. 39-40.

dimensions when, in her poem, 'Vigil of the Annunciation,' she contemplates the implications of Mary's 'entire resignation' for every believer.

All weareth, all wasteth,  
All flitteth, all hasteth,  
All of flesh and time:-  
Sound, sweet heavenly chime,  
Ring in the unutterable, eternal prime.

Man hopeth, man feareth,  
Man droopeth:- Christ cheereth,  
Compassing release,  
Comforting with peace,  
Promising rest where strife and anguish cease.

Saints waking, saints sleeping,  
Rest well in safe keeping;  
Well they rest today  
While they watch and pray,-  
But their tomorrow's rest what tongue shall say? (*CP*, p. 445)

In chapter one, I spoke of Rossetti's eschatological interpretation of Ecclesiastes. Here, by balancing the world-weariness that the preacher of the Old Testament book expresses with a hope in Christ, she further exemplifies the dynamics of her hermeneutical practice. By structuring the poem around the assurance that 'Man droopeth:- Christ cheereth' (line 7), she highlights the salvation that comes from an 'entire resignation' (see above) of the world where 'All weareth' and 'all wasteth' (line 1).

Including the poem in *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti leaves it untitled and makes no allusion to the Virgin Mary in the accompanying commentary. Instead, by way of introduction, she quotes from the Song of Songs 2:6, "'His right hand doth embrace me,'" saith peacefully the Bride of the Canticles' (*FD*, p. 37). By subsequently entitling the poem the 'Vigil of the Annunciation' in 'Some Feasts and Fasts,' she builds on the conflation of the Bride of the Canticles with Mary which, according to Marina Warner, Ambrose introduced in

the fourth century and which subsequently remained a mainstay of mystical hermeneutics.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, the poem's depiction of Christ, 'Compassing release, | Comforting with peace' (lines 8-9), corresponds to the imagery of embrace between the Lover and the Beloved in the Song of Songs. However, by speaking of 'All' (lines 1,2,3), 'Man' (lines 6,7), and 'Saints' (line 11) instead of the Bride or of Mary, Rossetti highlights the inclusiveness of her typological understanding. Indeed, rather than offer a contemplation of Mary herself, she uses her as a model for 'all' who wait for the sound of the 'sweet heavenly chime' (line 4) which, she believes, will usher in New Jerusalem.

In 'Some Feasts and Fasts,' exemplifying the repetition that characterises the spiral ascent of the individual journey and mapping the ongoing movement from 'Feast' to 'Fast' by switching abruptly from a consideration of the 'Vigil' to the 'Feast' of the Annunciation, and by moving from impersonal and universal pronouns to a more subjective language, Rossetti highlights the dramatic change that Mary's obedience facilitates and Christ's birth initiates. Added to this, in 'The Vigil of the Annunciation' by transcending the imagery of wasting weariness (line 1) as given in the Old Testament (Ecclesiastes 1-2, Job 14:10) and by imagining future comfort, Rossetti prepares for her intensely personal contemplation of the 'Feast of the Annunciation.'

In 1843, Rossetti, along with her sister and mother, began attending the newly established Christ Church, Albany Street.<sup>17</sup> In the account of the time he spent serving at this church, Henry W. Burrows, the incumbent between 1851 and 1878, speaks of 'the zealous earnestness of Mr Dodsworth and his

---

<sup>16</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1976), p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> The church was opened on July 13<sup>th</sup> 1837. See Henry W. Burrows, *The Half-Century of Christ Church* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1887), p. 10.

congregation' and considers the changes that took place in the church's first fifty years (Burrows, p. 14). One of the changes he highlights is the introduction of new hymns and the use of the volumes of the Psalms that he and Dodsworth composed for singing (ibid, p. 64). I want to suggest that it is through her engagement with the liturgical practice of chanting and singing the Psalms that Rossetti's poetic expression of this 'zealous earnestness' can best be evidenced. Adhering to the Tractarian notion that liturgy is divinely inspired, in the introduction to the commentary on the Psalms which he initiated and Richard Frederick Littledale completed, Neale refers to the significance of the practice of Psalmody or the musical recitation of the Psalms in Church when he notes that 'Many who have made little progress in literature [...] have the Psalter by heart.'<sup>18</sup> Throughout *Called to be Saints*, Rossetti presumes a shared familiarity with the Prayer Book amongst her readers when she implicitly aligns her meditations on New Testament passages with the Psalter. In her study of the Annunciation, she demonstrates her adherence to the Church calendar when she reads the portions of Mary's history which it commends 'to our reverent thoughts.' (CS, p. 176). Following this, she provides a form of typological investigation in her 'Memorial of the Annunciation' when she conflates various Bible passages and phrases to offer a continuous narrative of the Annunciation. Running alongside this, she re-works Psalm 119:33-104. The fact that out of the twenty-two memorials Rossetti uses in *Called to be Saints*, six are based upon a typological reading of Psalm 119 indicates her engagement with its various

---

<sup>18</sup> J.M. Neale, 'Introduction: Dissertation 1' in J.M. Neale and R.F. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Medieval Writers*, 4 volumes, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Joseph Masters and Co, 1869- 1883), i, pp. 1-88 (p. 1). In the 'Preface to the Second Edition,' Littledale writes that, following Neale's death in 1866, he edited and added sections the *Commentary* so as to complete it. The dissertations remain Neale's own. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text citing the volume and page number and signified by the title *Commentary on the Psalms*.

inflections. As a whole, Neale and Littledale reflect that Psalm 119 corresponds to the ‘form of prayer in dialogue’ that characterises the liturgy and argue that throughout it, ‘the universal choir of the Saints speaks, whether they be those who were from the beginning of the world, who are now, or are expected to be hereafter’ (*Commentary on the Psalms*, iv, p. 2).

Charting the correspondences between the Prayer Book version of Psalm 119:33-104 and the authorised Gospel reading for March 25<sup>th</sup>, ‘The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary,’ Rossetti conflates Mary’s proclamation, “be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38) with the words of Psalm 119:37, ‘O turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity: and quicken Thou me in Thy way’ (CS 186-87). Concluding her ‘Memorial,’ she incorporates her poem, ‘Herself a rose, who bore the Rose’ (CS, p. 193/ CP, p. 446).

Herself a rose, who bore the Rose,  
She bore the rose and felt its thorn.  
All loveliness new-born  
Took on her bosom its repose,  
And slept and woke there night and morn.

Lily herself, she bore the one  
Fair Lily, sweeter, whiter, far  
Than she or others are:  
The Sun of Righteousness her Son,  
She was His morning star.

She gracious, He essential Grace,  
He was the Fountain, she the rill:  
Her goodness to fulfil  
And gladness, with proportioned pace  
He led her steps thro’ good and ill.

Christ’s mirror she of grace and love,  
Of beauty and of life and death:  
By hope and love and faith  
Transfigured to His Likeness, “Dove,  
Spouse, Sister, Mother,” Jesus saith.

By structuring the poem around the line, 'She gracious, He essential Grace' and the imagery of the 'Fountain' and the 'rill' (lines 11, 12), Rossetti reinforces the words of the collect which beseech God to 'pour grace into our hearts.' In addition, she builds upon her apostolic understanding of the correlation between bodily eyes and the inward eye of the soul when, suggesting that authentic identity comes only from immersion in Christ, she speaks of the transmutation that takes place between the gazer and the object. Indeed, it is only by describing Mary as 'Christ's mirror' (line 16) that she is able to fully justify her labelling of her as 'a rose' (line 1) and a 'lily' (line 6). Making it clear that it is Christ who leads 'her steps thro' good and ill' (line 15), she suggests that Mary's holiness is a supernatural, rather than natural, attribute.

In 1849 Rossetti modelled for Dante Gabriel's painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*. In this, he depicts an adolescent Mary, supervised by St. Anne, embroidering a lily on to a stole. She copies from a real lily which is balanced on top of a pile of books. Whilst Dolores Rosenblum suggests that in such paintings, Dante Gabriel 'produces an image of woman that stresses not only her mysterious iconic powers, but also her social powerlessness;' Betty Flowers contends that rather than challenge this powerlessness, Rossetti was content to remain in the 'ascetic virgin's room of Dante Gabriel's painting, her poetry growing toward more control and conciseness even as his painting moved toward more elaboration and lusciousness.'<sup>19</sup> Moving away from these conceptions, Linda Peterson argues that Rossetti was neither happy to be rendered obsolete in art, nor content to remain imprisoned, but rather offered a poetic resistance. She

---

<sup>19</sup> Dolores Rosenblum, 'Christina Rossetti's Religious Poetry: Watching, Looking, Keeping Vigil,' *Victorian poetry*, 20 (1982), 33-49 (p. 38); Betty S. Flowers, 'The Kingly Self: Rossetti as Woman Artist,' in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 159-174 (p. 160).

claims that in departing from traditional iconography by showing Mary sewing rather than reading a book, Dante Gabriel limits Mary to the private sphere and restricts 'women's art to the domestic and reproductive,' denying 'its right to be fully and originally interpretative.' Arguing that, 'while in her devotional poetry and prose, Christina Rossetti seems to remain safely within the feminine sphere defined by her brother's paintings,' Peterson suggests that 'in her great narrative poems [...] she writes herself out of his painting and challenges his assumptions about women's art.'<sup>20</sup> Rather than remaining 'safely within' a 'feminine sphere,' I want to suggest that working *within* the bounds of her brother's figuration of the Virgin creating an artistic imitation of the real lily, Rossetti finds a basis upon which to directly challenge 'his assumptions.' In her book, *The Poetics of Gender*, Nancy K. Miller claims she chooses to use the word 'arachnology' to indicate 'a critical positioning which reads against the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity; to recover within representation the emblems of its construction.'<sup>21</sup> It is precisely this process of discovery and recovery that, I want to suggest, motivates Rossetti's typological figuration of weaving and embroidery in her poetry and leads to her to endow with renewed significance a practice based on imitation and representation.

In her 1856 poem, 'The Lowest Room' (*CP*, p. 194-201) Rossetti intertwines references to Homer's legends, the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, and the letters of the New Testament when she alludes to the practice of embroidery as empowering. In the poem, the younger sister, busy

---

<sup>20</sup> Linda H. Peterson, 'Restoring the Book: The Typological Hermeneutics of Christina Rossetti and the PRB,' *Victorian Poetry*, 37 (1994), 209-231 (p. 210).

<sup>21</sup> Nancy K. Miller, *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 272.



weaving ‘the field | With warriors armed to strike’ (lines 75-6), is said to ‘thrive’ as ‘God’s blessed husbandry’ (line 249). This allusion comes from 1 Corinthians 3.9 which states that since ‘we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.’ In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti further deploys the metaphor of weaving when she describes the process of securing eternal life. Depicting the ‘Spotless and radiant’ garment of salvation that each believer much ‘weave’ for herself (p. 138), she writes,

it has been steeped in tears and bleached in the heat of the day: woven and at length without flaw from top throughout it forms one fair unbroken web; but held up to that light which manifests all works, behold! its warp and woof have not been wrought into a perfect whole except by an interweaving of cross threads, of *crosses*. The acts and crosses of each day and every day, your acts and crosses and my own, are capable of reappearing in that achieved glory.

If the Revised Version incites us to abound in labour to-day while it is called to-day, the Authorized promotes no different result by enamouring us of that final perfection when having been done both for and by the Church (for the things concerning her also have an end), she shall be presented as a chaste virgin to Christ: and so shall the king have pleasure in her beauty. (*italics in the original*, p. 437)

With this depiction of spiritual empowerment in mind; when Dante Gabriel’s painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* is considered along ‘Feast of the Annunciation’ and ‘Herself a rose,’ some powerful typological ramifications emerge. Most significantly, in ‘Feast of the Annunciation,’ the act of imitation is rendered one of divine power and knowledge. As the believer ‘devoutly’ copies (line 9) the words of Gabriel, she reaches a more complete understanding of her place in the divine schema. Likewise, in ‘Herself a rose,’ Rossetti suggests that Mary is able to be depicted as a ‘lily herself’ *because* Christ is ‘the one | Fair Lily, sweeter, whiter, far | Than she or others are’ (lines 6-8). I want to suggest that it is precisely because Mary can be described as ‘Christ’s mirror’ (line 16) that Rossetti is able to simultaneously align her with each individual believer. In

her book, *The Subversive Stitch: embroidery and the making of the feminine*, Roszika Parker notes that in medieval embroidery 'the miracle of Mary's fertility' is 'connoted by the lily of the Annunciation.'<sup>22</sup> With this in mind, by using stitching metaphors to highlight the new life that a comprehension of Christ's suffering and resurrection can bring, Rossetti can be seen to work creatively with the symbol of the lily in order to conflate medieval notions of fertility with conceptions of renunciation and thereby challenge the nineteenth-century association of sewing with feminine weakness.

Outlining the development that Mary underwent as she gradually become 'Christ's mirror,' Rossetti uses 'Herself a rose' to articulate a model of selfhood rooted in the process of becoming 'Transfigured to His Likeness' (line 19). Throughout, by finding typological correspondences between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament revelation, she establishes her meditation on the Virgin Mary within the confines of patristic hermeneutics and exemplifies the Tractarian practice of moving to and fro between biblical narratives in order to demonstrate the unity of the Scriptures. For instance, when she describes Christ as 'The Sun of Righteousness her Son' (line 9), she suggests the importance of understanding the second person of the Trinity within the framework of Malachi's prophecy that, for those who 'fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings' (Malachi 4:2). Portraying Mary as a vessel through whom the Son of God is able to 'arise' and bring 'healing,' Rossetti implicitly links her to the community of disciples who are called to 'spread abroad' their faith in God (1 Thessalonians 1:8). In the last verse, by using the language of the collect for the 'Feast of the Annunciation,' she also

---

<sup>22</sup> Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: embroidery and the making of the feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1996), p. 37.

suggests placing Mary's vessel-like attributes in the context of each believer's devotional practice. As Mary reflects Christ, Rossetti claims that she is filled with the transformative 'grace and love' (line 16) that enables her to participate in the glory of the resurrection. In 'Some Feasts and Fasts,' by positioning the poem after the 'Feast of the Annunciation,' the last of the five feast days that the Anglican Church associates with Mary, she hints at the *ongoing* significance of her example.

Teresa Brennan offers a useful framework through which Rossetti's allusions to the transmutation that takes place between Christ and the Virgin Mary, Christ and the believer, and between the individuals that constitute the Communion of Saints can be understood.

The identity founded in one's self-image is simultaneously a spatial construction. That image is deflected back to the self from an other, one's ideal image, which also gives one a perspective on oneself. One sees oneself through the eye of the other, so three factors are at work; one's self, one's image, and the other who validates the image. For Lacan, the interlocking of self and other constitutes an imaginary space, which is imaginary in that fantasies interlock within it. By my argument, these interlocking fantasies are also physical. In this respect they can be either an endogenous or an exogenous matter, something the self does to the self, energetically speaking, or something that is also directed toward the self by the other's goal-seeking aggressive projections.<sup>23</sup>

According to Rossetti's figuration, despite recognising the physical and material ramifications of reflection, the 'ideal image' which 'gives one a perspective on oneself' is not a fictional construction but the ultimate Truth of the Trinity. In *The Face of the Deep*, she envisions the realisation of this process when she writes of reaching the 'beautified life' where 'Christ shall call each happy, heavenly soul by name, as once He called "Mary"' (p. 73). In chapter one, I noted Rossetti's utilisation of the word 'happy' for 'saved.' Considered within the

---

<sup>23</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 108-9.

framework of Brennan's terminology, the married woman that Rossetti describes, who is only able to see 'through a glass darkly' (*LS*, p. 92), forfeits not only her exclusive focus on the spiritual but also endangers her salvation by allowing herself to be transformed, negatively and positively, by the energetic affects of her husband and the material world.<sup>24</sup>

Responding to Brennan's arguments, Kate Flint speaks of George Eliot's emphasis on the significance of sympathetic relationships and envisions the development of an affective reader response theory, stating that she is 'struck by the possibility that what we read, as well as whom we encounter, may provoke changes in the pheromones that we emanate.'<sup>25</sup> As I will move on to demonstrate, the notion of transmitted pheromones can be aligned to Rossetti's explication of the physical and sensory experience of the believer as she is transformed into a part of the Community of Saints by the Holy Spirit through praying, reading the Scriptures, and carefully monitoring her own gaze. As a result of this, she identifies and merges her identity with Christ's and emanates his virtues by offering herself as a mirror to his love. That the physical and the spiritual aspects of a person merge as an individual allows God to transform her innermost being is an idea that the Ancient Fathers battled with. Psalm 119:82 reads, 'Mine eyes long sore for thy word: saying O, when wilt thou comfort me?' In their commentary on this verse, Neale and Littledale highlight Ambrose's mystical explication in which he asks why 'eyes' are spoken of in 119:82 there is only one 'eye' of the soul. Following this, they put forward Bellarmine's suggestion that, 'The more literal, but less beautiful, explanation is that the *eyes*

---

<sup>24</sup> Brennan writes that 'affects have an energetic dimension. This is why they enhance or deplete' (p. 6).

<sup>25</sup> 'Perspectives on Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect*.' Contributors include Susan James, Mary Hamer, Kate Flint, Amber Jacobs and Gillian Beer in, *Women: a cultural review*, 17:1 (2006), 103-117 (p. 111).

are but the instruments of the soul, which speaks through them, and is the *me* for which comfort is desired' (italics in the original, *Commentary on the Psalms*, iv, p. 75-6). The fact that, in her 'Memorial of the Annunciation,' Rossetti has the verse follow the proclamation 'I have not forgotten Thy law' (Psalm 119:61) and conflates both with Isaiah 38:16, 'O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt Thou recover me, and make me to live,' (CS, p. 184) is suggestive of her understanding of reaching a fullness of life through a righteous stewardship of *both* the spirit and the flesh.

In response to the entreaties of her lover, the Beloved of the Song of Songs proclaims, 'I AM the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys' (2:1). Highlighting the importance of a righteous stewardship of the spirit and the flesh, Rossetti suggests that it is similarly as a *response* to Christ's love and grace that believers are able to perceive the 'love-name [...] expressive of what He was and is to that one soul, and what that one soul to Him' (FD, p. 73). In *Annus Domini*, she uses the Beloved's proclamation as the basis for her prayer,

O Lord Jesus Christ, Lily of the Valleys, clothe us, I beseech Thee, in whiteness of purity, greenness of hope, fragrance of prayer: and grant that no enemy may pluck us out of Thy Hand (prayer no. 101).

By using terms the words 'whiteness,' 'greenness,' and 'fragrance' to describe the process of the believer being purified and strengthened by Christ, Rossetti is able to speak of spiritual transformation in sensory terms. In their reading of Psalm 23, Neale and Littledale suggest that the word 'green' carries the notion of 'being constantly refreshed with the dew of the HOLY GHOST' and 'shaded from the burning sun of temptation' (*Commentary on the Psalms*, i, p. 276).

In 1869, Littledale published his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Originally intended for the instruction of the inmates of a religious house, he

claims that his purpose in reaching out to a wider audience was to work alongside other contemporary commentaries to 'restore' the book back to 'its proper position as an element of religious teaching, and as affording ample subject matter for practical meditation.'<sup>26</sup> In light of this, he offers a systematic compilation from the writings of the Fathers in the hope of bestowing on the Song of Songs the 'completeness of treatment' it deserves (ibid, p. v). Instead of presenting the Beloved as a straight-forward representative of the Church as many of his contemporaries were doing, he elucidates the patristic tradition which perceives of her in many forms. Among others, he makes frequent mention of; St Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret, Ambrose, and Origen.

A reading of Littledale's commentary on the patristic interpretations of the Song of Songs 2:1 highlights the basis for Rossetti's concern with the process of being clothed with the 'fragrance of prayer.' He quotes from S. Ambrose:

CHRIST was the Flower of Mary, and sprang from the virgin womb to shed the sweet perfume of faith throughout the world. A flower, though cut down, retains its fragrance, and if pounded, collects it, not does it lose it by being torn up. So too the LORD JESUS withered not when ground upon the Cross, nor did He disappear when so torn away from us, but when wounded with that piercing of the spear, He, Who cannot die, bloomed yet more beauteously with the Precious Blood He shed, breathing forth the gift of eternal life to them which were dead. (p. 58)

It is the connection between sacrifice and grace that this image highlights that, I want to suggest, fuels the 'Feasts and Fasts' sequence. By speaking of the crucifixion Christ as a 'flower [...] cut down' and eternal life as the 'perfume' and 'fragrance' it emits, Ambrose constructs the basis upon which Rossetti's poetic preoccupation with flowers is founded. When, towards the end of the *Annus Domini*, she prays that 'Jesus Christ, Rose of Sharon, whose Thorns were

---

<sup>26</sup> Richard Frederick Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs: From Ancient and Mediaeval Sources* (New York: Pott & Amery, 1869) p. v.

indeed sharp and piercing' might 'give us grace [...] to suffer with Thee and for Thy sake, and to love Thee above all else that Thou givest us to love' (prayer no. 225), she highlights the implications of reaching a complete transformation through identification with the crown of 'Thorns' that Jesus was made to wear on his head as he was taken to be crucified. Furthermore, she expresses the physicality of, what Brennan terms, the interlocking space where the self comes to terms with the nature of her selfhood through the realisation of her reflection or immersion in the other.

Throughout *The Transmission of Affect*, Brennan repeatedly highlights the significance of olfactory transmission. She suggests that 'people can act alike and feel alike not only because they observe each other but also because they imbibe each other via smell' (Brennan, p. 10). In her investigation of phenomenon she calls 'chemical entrainment,' she argues that 'To smell pheromones is also in a sense to consume them' (ibid, p. 69). Bringing Brennan's theory into dialogue with Rossetti's engagement with the patristic concern with fragrance means re-conceptualising the understanding of subjectivity her writings present. Indeed, when read in conjunction with the notion of olfactory transmission, Rossetti's argument that since Christ's 'garments have come to smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia,' believers should respond by allowing their prayers to 'ascend as incense,' can be shown to illustrate a spiritual transformation through a process of imbibing. As the individual increases her awareness of Christ's presence, Rossetti suggests that she simultaneously consumes something of His person.

Towards the end of 'Some Feasts and Fasts,' Rossetti reflects on the cost of entering into a relationship with Christ and becoming a saint. In her sonnet,

‘All Saints’ (*CP*, p. 453), she writes that the ‘love’ of saints ‘glows upward, outward, thro’ and thro’ and, ‘like a stream of incense launched on flame | Fresh saints stream up from death to life above | To shine among those others and rejoice’ (lines 8-11). Following this, she includes another sonnet, ‘All Saints: Martyrs.’ Here, she remembers those believers who have been ‘slain for Him’ and who are ‘Now made alive in Him for evermore’ (lines 1-2). By taking the title of her next poem, “I gave a sweet smell” (*CP*, p. 454), from Paul’s declaration that he has received from the Philippians ‘an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God’ (Philippians 4:18), she draws the previous sonnets together as she emphasises the implicit correspondence between the self-oblation sacrifice of believers and the consumption and emission of the ‘sweet smell’ of Christ. She begins the poem,

Saints are like roses when they flush rarest,  
Saints are like lilies when they bloom fairest.  
Saints are like violets sweetest of their kind. (lines 1-3)

By suggesting that it is when they offer themselves to God as a sacrifice that the saints resemble the flowers which ‘flush rarest,’ ‘bloom fairest,’ and smell ‘sweetest,’ she typologically adds a further dimension to her earlier poems on the Virgin Mary. Indeed, by understanding ‘Feast of the Annunciation’ and ‘Herself a rose who bore the rose’ through the framework of her poetic exploration of Christian sacrifice, Rossetti emphasises the notion that it is only through imitating Christ’s act of self-oblation on the cross that Mary is honoured. In ‘Feast of the Annunciation,’ she argues that Mary realises her God-given potential when she demonstrates a self-forgetful willingness to reflect the ‘Lily’ and the ‘Rose’ that characterise her son (lines 3, 4). In ‘Herself a rose, who bore the rose,’ she highlights the sacrifice that Mary made when she ‘bore the rose



and felt its thorn' (line 2). It is this sacrifice, she moves on to suggest, that enabled her to live as a 'rill' and 'mirror' (lines 12, 16) of Christ. By repeatedly depicting the willing self-oblation of the Virgin Mary in terms of a vessel and a reflection, Rossetti highlights the fluid boundaries that constitute the imbibing relationship between the individual and the Holy Spirit.

In her book, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*, Margaret Homans' exploration of the 'myth of maternity,' whereby the 'fetus [sic] originates in an authoritative male source and passes through a female body that is constructed as a potentially dangerous growth medium'<sup>27</sup> reinforces Warner's view that 'It was a deeply misogynistic and contemptuous view of women's role in reproduction that made the idea of conception by the power of the Spirit more acceptable' (Warner, p. 47). Indeed, Homans claims that as a result of the definition of the 1854 Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which, she argues, effectively neutralized 'the idea that the incarnation makes Christ human,' the worship of Mary as mother was predicated on a 'profound hatred for women's bodies' (Homans, p. 157). Central to the explication of the Immaculate Conception was Pope Pius IX's argument that Mary 'in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the omnipotent God; in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin.' He suggests that this doctrine 'has been revealed by God, and therefore is to be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.'<sup>28</sup> Discussing

---

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 156.

<sup>28</sup> Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius IX on the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1854), quoted in Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Devotion*, 2 parts (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963, 1965), ii, p. 81-2.

the Virgin's Assumption as mediated through this misogynistic patriarchal tradition, Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that,

Conceptually a collapsing of first and second burial occurs, which completely circumvents dissolution and corruption of the body, and by implication places her [the Virgin Mary] from the start outside the 'feminine realm of material time and bodily decay and into the 'masculine' symbolic realm of eternal unchanged forms.<sup>29</sup>

Responding to these arguments, I want to suggest that it is through the typological utilisation of the language used in the Song of Songs to describe sensory experiences that Rossetti's depictions of the physicality of the space of interaction between Christ and the believer fully incorporate, rather than exclude, awareness of the body, thus bringing the Virgin back into the 'feminine realm of material time.' Indeed, it is Mary's very *human* response of awe and humility once she becomes impregnated by the Holy Spirit that forms the basis of Rossetti's admiration of her. Whether or not she was 'preserved exempt from all stain of original sin' is not a question that she was willing to grapple with, nor let interfere with her representation of the Virgin as a model for all believers whether male or female. Indeed, in her unpublished 'Notes' on Exodus 1:22, she suggests that in the distinction between the penalty of death which has been laid on man, and that of life which has been laid on women, 'lies the true key which supersedes any need of an 'Immaculate Conception.' Rather than pertaining to an anti-feminist agenda, her argument that 'from the father alone is derived the stock and essence of the child; the mother receptive,' she emphasises the basis upon which her understanding of the Virgin Mary as a 'receptive' vessel is predicated.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> Christina Rossetti, 'unpublished Notes on Exodus,' quoted in Lona Mosk Packer, *Christina Rossetti* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 330.

Following their conception of virginity as an interior disposition in imitation of Christ, the Patristic Fathers frequently figure each believer as the Virgin Mary. It is therefore unsurprising to find Tractarian writings doing likewise and emphasising the receptiveness necessary to live a life guided by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, a reading of Keble's poem 'The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary' posits a possible basis for various aspects of Rossetti's typological interpretations of individual personhood. As well as associating Mary with the Song of Songs' Beloved by naming her Jesus' 'holy dove', it also aligns her with all Christians. In the last verse of the poem, he explicates his theology when he writes,

Bless'd is the womb that bare Him—bless'd  
The bosom where His lips were press'd,  
But rather bless'd are they  
Who hear His word and keep it well,  
The living homes where Christ shall dwell,  
And never pass away. (lines 55-60)<sup>31</sup>

Here, Keble aligns the Virgin Mary with the individual believer by focusing on the importance of retaining the word of God and never letting it 'pass away' (line 60). In doing this, he works with the patristic notion that Mary embodies a love that perseveres through deferral since it is one that can only be consummated in heaven. Indeed, by alluding to the Beatitudes through a repetition of the phrase 'Bless'd are they' (line 57), he imagines the believer who imitates Mary as one of the downtrodden and meek individuals to whom Christ promises *future* comfort (Matthew 5:1-11). In addition, through his emphasis on keeping 'His word' (line 58), he reinforces the unstinting persistence that he believes underpins a life of holy obedience. Echoing Keble's focus on the humility

---

<sup>31</sup> John Keble, 'The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary,' in *The Christian Year* (Oxford; London: James Parker and Co, 1866), pp. 240-242 (p. 242).

needed to persevere, Edward Pusey suggests that ‘If we would truly see Him, we must seek to have the mirror of our hearts cleansed, that it may receive His glorious Image.’<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, along with Rossetti, both Keble and Pusey maintain that it is only in Heaven that the goal of such perseverance can be achieved, the ultimate process of cleansing can be completed, and God fully known.

Discussing the complications arising from focusing too much on the present and from taking the Virgin Mary as a role model in society, Michael Wheeler argues that since she represents a patriarchal feminine ideal, ‘the imitation of Mary is seen as a social goal as well as a spiritual exercise’ and ‘easily becomes a means of social control within patriarchy.’<sup>33</sup> Warner voices her concern with this concept of social control and emphasises the supreme effort and courage that Mary demonstrated as she accepted Christ into herself and allowed her identity to become a part of his. She writes that

In Christian theology Mary’s consent to the Incarnation, her *Fiat*, exemplifies the most sublime fusion of man’s free will with the divine plan. The free cooperation of man and God for salvation bears the metaphysical name of synergy, but this magnificent and lofty view of Mary’s act of acceptance came to epitomize a restricted moral notion quite unworthy of the term: that of feminine submissiveness. (italics in the original, Warner, p. 117)

Like Brennan’s notion of transmitting affects through energetic connection, Warner’s understanding of ‘synergy’ relies on the concept of an interlocked space whereby two beings immerse themselves in engagement with the other. As I will demonstrate, it is Rossetti’s focus on Mary’s courage to enter this interlocked space, making herself vulnerable to the metamorphic transformation

---

<sup>32</sup> Edward Pusey, ‘The Vision of God’ in Sermons during the season from Advent to Whitsuntide (1848), in *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, ed. by Owen Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 57-60 (p. 226).

<sup>33</sup> Michael Wheeler, *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 230.

of the Holy Spirit that enables her representations of the Annunciation to move beyond those of her Tractarian contemporaries and anticipate those of twentieth century feminist writers. Her depiction of Mary's courage also provides the basis whereby she is able to offer the Virgin as an authentic role model for each believer.

In *Time Flies*, contemplating the visitation and the gifts of the Magi, Rossetti writes

Example kindles enthusiasm, enthusiasm aspires to emulate. But unfortunately pseudo-aspiration often selects points impossible to be emulated, and overlooks at least some one point within the boundary of possible imitation (*TF*, January 11; p. 10).

It is the 'pseudo-aspiration' of the Virgin Mary, which focuses on her virginity and submission in lieu of her courage and strength, which Rossetti repeatedly repudiates. Instead of emphasising her meek 'feminine' nature or participating in contemporary debates about her perpetual virginity or her ascension, she highlights the virtues that all believers, male or female, can emulate. Certainly, in the 'Vigil of the Annunciation,' the 'Feast of the Annunciation,' and 'Herself a rose, who bore the rose,' it is the characteristics of obedience, patience, courage and love that are highlighted. Not once is the unattainable and inimitable ideal of her divine motherhood alluded to. Just as Mary allowed Christ to lead 'her steps thro' good and ill' ('Herself a rose,' line 15) so too, she suggests, should each believer allow Christ to guide them through life. In her discussion of the Victorian preoccupation with models of femininity, Tricia Lootens suggests that Mary is 'an impossible model' in view of her eternal youth and her freedom from carnal weaknesses.<sup>34</sup> In view of these supernatural attributes, Mary Daly

---

<sup>34</sup> Tricia Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), p. 55-6.

highlights the ‘power that the image of Mary has wielded in the human imagination.’ However, rather than recasting her, she considers the ramifications for ‘the future becoming of women’ that emerge from a consideration of the ancient image of the Mother Goddess’ which underpin the ‘sometimes God-like status of Mary.’<sup>35</sup>

In response to Lootens and Daly, I would like to suggest that is by repeatedly focusing on the imitable aspects of Mary that Rossetti is able to simultaneously offer a pointed retort to the deification of the Virgin and a revisionary articulation of, what Daly refers to as, ‘the future becoming of women.’ Indeed, her concern is to edify her female readers in their faith, not empower them as autonomous individuals. In *The Face of the Deep*, she exemplifies her stance against the deification of the Virgin when she suggests that the cross closes the chasm that the Church has constructed between her and Eve and Mary Magdalene. She writes,

Eve exhibits one extreme of female character, the Blessed Virgin the opposite extreme. Eve parlayed with the devil: holy Mary “was troubled” at the salutation of an Angel. Eve sought knowledge: Mary instruction. Eve aimed at self-indulgence: Mary at self-oblation. Eve, by disbelief and dis-obedience, brought sin to the birth: Mary by faith and submission, Righteousness.

And yet, even as at the foot of the Cross, St. Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, stood beside the “lily among thorns”, the Mother of sorrows: so (I humbly hope and trust) amongst all saints of all time will stand before the Throne, Eve the beloved first Mother of us all. Who that has loved and revered her own immediate dear mother, will not echo the hope? (*FD*, p. 310-11)

Following the emphasis she places on her belief that salvation can be found in the cross alone, by calling her readers to reflect upon the bond they share with their own mothers, Rossetti speaks of the process of constructing a legitimate

---

<sup>35</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (London: The Women’s Press, 1986), p. 83-4.

feminine identity when she encourages moving towards a compassionate identification with Eve which transcends doctrinal policy and embraces the New Testament precepts of forgiveness and redemption.

In her essay, 'Father's Place, Mother's Space: Identity, Italy, and the Maternal,' Alison Chapman explores Rossetti's relationship with her own mother and argues that from the closeness of their bond, she gained the ability to immerse herself into various states of subjectivity. Considering the fact that Rossetti was able to write her mother's diary for her, she contends,

The ventriloquized, and in the final entries, prosopopoeic, diary illustrates Christina Rossetti's ability to transpose subject positions between her own signature and that of her mother's. This dialectic translation from self to maternal and back again suggests a subject discursively engaged with the mother as Other. Rossetti's diary entries adopt a subject-in-process that enjoys an intersubjectivity which questions the stability of identity, for the stability is established at the expense of exile from the mother necessitated by the entry into the Symbolic Order.<sup>36</sup>

Interpreting Chapman's analysis of 'intersubjectivity' within a biblical framework is helpful in a consideration of Rossetti's conception of Eve as a mother figure, an anti-type of the Virgin Mary and a pre-figuring of each individual. Indeed, the process whereby Rossetti is able to identify with biblical characters in 'Some Feasts and Fasts' can be thought of in much the same way as the process whereby she identified with her own mother. However, countering Chapman's Freudian notion that stability can only be established 'at the expense of exile,' it is my contention that it is in the movement *away* from the self and towards identification with biblical figures that Rossetti is able to figure authentic spiritual stability. As she conflates the Virgin Mary with Mary Magdalene and Eve, so too does she conflate herself and her readers with all

---

<sup>36</sup> Alison Chapman, 'Father's Place, Mother's Space: Identity, Italy, and the Maternal' in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, ed. by Mary Arseneau, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, and Antony H. Harrison (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999), pp. 235-59 (p. 239).

three biblical women in the process of understanding what it means to live as an integrated member of the bride of Christ.

Robert Kachur argues that by repeatedly focusing on feminine imagery and rhetoric, Rossetti suggests that all believers must become more like women in order to recognise and reflect their proper relationship with God. He writes that in doing this she follows the pattern of medieval writers such as Bernard of Clairvaux who ‘recognized man’s need to take on the “female” role before God.’<sup>37</sup> Certainly, in promoting an attitude of submissive obedience to Christ, Rossetti encourages believers to imitate biblical women and adheres to the pattern set by the medieval writers and the Ancient Fathers who promote the development of traits traditionally associated with femininity such as humility, gentleness and openness. Indeed, Flowers suggests that Rossetti’s implied reader is the “female” in us’ and argues that her poetry ‘enacts the process by which the “woman” learns obedience’ and dramatises the shaping of the self ‘from rebellious Eve into obedient, contemplative Mary’ (Flowers, p. 167). Whilst I agree with the arguments that both Kachur and Flowers make, I want to suggest that their criticism stands ripe for misinterpretation in that it fails to fully distinguish the various models of femininity that were available to Rossetti. If Rossetti’s implied reader is to be understood as the “female” in us all then it is important to consider what is meant by the term ‘female’ and avoid confusing the biblical representations of women with which she was concerned, with representations akin to the notion of the Victorian woman popularised by twentieth-century critics. Rather than conflating Rossetti’s understanding of

---

<sup>37</sup> Robert M. Kachur, ‘Repositioning the Female Christian Reader: Christina Rossetti as Tractarian Hermeneut in *The Face of the Deep*’, *Victorian Poetry*, 35 (1997), 193-213 (p. 203).



godly femininity with a model synonymous with that offered in Coventry Patmore's 'The Angel in the House,' I want to suggest that her understanding of female purity is underpinned by the notion of strength.<sup>38</sup>

In her 1839 sonnet, 'The Annunciation,' Felicia Hemans offers an interpretation of the Virgin Mary which corresponds to the popularised notion of the meek and submissive Victorian woman.

Chosen of heaven! that hour: but thou, oh! thou,  
E'en as a flower with gracious rains o'er fraught,  
Thy virgin head beneath its crown dist bow,  
And take to thy meek breast the all holy word,  
And own thyself the handmaid of the Lord. (lines 10-14)<sup>39</sup>

In 'Herself a rose, who bore the Rose,' by emphasising the fact that Mary's nature is based entirely on the precept of existing as 'Christ's mirror' (line 16), by linking her to the early Corinthian believers, and by understanding her within the typological framework of Psalm 119 Rossetti is able to transform Hemans' depiction of an 'o'er fraught' and 'meek' virgin (lines 11, 13) and replace it with the image of an individual who has been strengthened and illuminated by her Creator. Indeed, whereas Hemans' uses floral imagery to highlight Mary's fragility and mildness, Rossetti's depiction of Mary as a flower after the pattern of her son, the ultimate 'Rose' and 'Fair Lily' (line 7), suggests her perseverance and agency and endows her with supernatural strength.

Denise Levertov's poem, 'Annunciation,' speaks of the long-lasting effects that depictions such as Hemans' have had on influencing how the scene of the Annunciation is understood.

---

<sup>38</sup> Coventry Patmore, 'The Angel in the House' (1856), in *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000), pp. 557-560.

<sup>39</sup> Felicia Dorothea Browne Hemans, 'The Annunciation,' in *The works of Mrs. Hemans; With a memoir of her life, by her sister* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1839), p. 222-3.

But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions  
Courage.

The engendering spirit  
did not enter her without consent  
God waited.

She was free  
to accept or to refuse, choice  
integral to humanness. (lines 6-13)<sup>40</sup>

By highlighting Mary's feminist potential by illustrating her 'courage' which enabled her to *choose* to accept God's 'engendering spirit' (lines 7-8), Levertov articulates the notions of 'synergy' and empowerment that Rossetti's poems foreground. The notion that Mary 'was free | to accept or to refuse' (lines 11-2) the unique burden which had been placed upon her emphasises the extent of her free will and exemplifies the notion of self-sacrifice which, according to Rossetti, underpins the reverence all believers should hold towards her.

According to VanEsvelde Adams, 'Victorian authors did not limit their focus to Madonna, but frequently paired them with Magdalenes; they were especially interested in the interchangeability of the two figures' (VanEsvelde Adams, p. 103). Rossetti's concern with this interchangeability can be highlighted in her prayer, 'Make us as Mary [Magdalene] when she turned and said Rabboni' (*FD*, p. 515). Here, by asking that believers become 'as Mary,' Rossetti offers a radical re-conceptualisation of female and male identity, not merely by aligning the individual to Mary, but by suggesting that all self-interest should be diminished in the sacrificial act of offering oneself to God. As I have demonstrated, this same concern pervades those of Rossetti's poems which are based on the Virgin Mary. Thus, it is in the process of escaping from the imprisoning 'I' of self-identity that the two Marys can be conflated.

---

<sup>40</sup> Denise Levertov, 'A Door in the Hive' (1989), in *New Selected Poems* (Northumberland, Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2003) p. 162.

Although there is no scriptural evidence that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute before her repentance, by the nineteenth century it had become a commonplace assumption. Indeed, the word ‘Magdalene’ had become a synonym for a prostitute. Hence, despite its underlying theology, Rossetti’s prayer, ‘Make us as Mary [Magdalene]’ would have offended many orthodox sensibilities. Maria Rossetti’s publication, *Letters to My Bible Class*, reflects the difficulty many Victorians faced in their struggle to understand who Mary Magdalene was and how they should interpret their relation with her. After identifying with the ‘sinner’ Mary Magdalene in her quest to receive the ‘cup of salvation’, Maria writes in a footnote that ‘the identification of Mary Magdalene with the “woman who was a sinner” is confessedly wrong- see *Abp Trench* on “Parables”’ [sic].<sup>41</sup> Hence, she critiques her own typological rendering. Despite her awareness of the contemporary theological controversies surrounding the character of Mary Magdalene, Rossetti offers a more consistent picture, identifying her repeatedly with the ‘sinner’. In *Time Flies*, on the feast of Mary Magdalene, she writes:

A record of this saint is a record of love. She ministered to the Lord of her substance, she stood by the cross, she sat over against the sepulchre, she sought Christ in the empty grave and found Him and was found of Him in the contiguous garden.

Yet this is the same Mary Magdalen [sic] out of whom aforetime He had cast seven devils. Nevertheless, the golden cord of love we are contemplating did all along continue unbroken in its chief strand: for before she loved Him, He loved her. (*TF*, July 22; p. 139)

In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti speaks of Christ as He who ‘beheldest in Thy beloved Mary Magdalene first seven devils, then Thine own image’ (*FD*, p. 130).

---

<sup>41</sup> Maria Francesca Rossetti, *Letters to My Bible Class on Thirty-Nine Sundays* (London; Oxford: Christian Knowledge Society, 1872), p. 59.

Alongside the notion of finding Christ and being ‘found of Him’ (see above), this concept of reflecting, in oneself, Christ’s ‘own image,’ highlights the process of inner transformation which, for Rossetti, is the foundation upon which a trinitarian personhood is constructed.

To conclude my study of Rossetti’s typological realisation of the two Marys, I wish to highlight how her interpretations are grounded in a patristic framework of practical theology whereby time and history are rendered secondary to an eschatological understanding of the eternal schema. This understanding, I argue, highlights the interlocking spaces where Rossetti suggests identity is formed through an attitude of openness to the possibility of transformation by the Holy Spirit. It is as exemplars of this openness and as models of self-sacrificial love that Rossetti is able to offer the two Marys as imitable examples for every believer to follow.

## **ii. The Nun as the Bride of Christ**

In her convent poems, Rossetti repeatedly uses the scriptural imagery of reflections and shadows to typologically articulate the transformation of believers in both spatial and metaphysical terms. By utilising biblical allusions to depict the interior life of nuns, she is able to dramatise the complexities that are involved in actively choosing the ‘stairs that mount above’ (‘The Convent Threshold,’ *CP*, p. 55-9, line 4) and in reaching an understanding of the model of trinitarian personhood that is advocated by the Ancient Fathers and championed by the Tractarians. Following the critical identification of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholic convent as a place of female empowerment, Antony H. Harrison,

Diane D'Amico, and Frederick Roden suggest the links between the Oxford Movement and the emancipation of women and understand Rossetti's support of Anglican sisterhoods as *primarily* a feminist act.<sup>42</sup> It is my contention, however, that this view is limiting. Rather than looking to affirm women's political or cultural rights, I wish to argue that Rossetti's convent poems explore theological complexities and interrogate the very nature of personhood. More concerned with establishing the identity of the genderless soul rooted in God, than with depicting the position of the Victorian woman bound by cultural and social restrictions, I suggest how Rossetti uses them to nuance, actively engage with, and sometimes challenge, the theology of the prominent male Tractarian thinkers of the mid to late nineteenth-century.

In his account of the time he spent as a curate at Christ Church, Burrows speaks of how Dodsworth and his congregation occasioned the

church and district to become the first scene and starting-place of a movement which has had a great effect on the Church of England in the last half century, and is probably destined to affect the future of the whole Anglican communion throughout the world, I mean the formation of the first Anglican Sisterhood. (Burrows, 14)

Under the management of Edward Pusey, the Community of the Holy Cross was established at 17 Park Village West in 1845. Raymond Chapman claims that it was the establishment of this first Anglican sisterhood 'which seized Christina's imagination and brought the figure of the nun out of the realm of sensational historical fiction and into reality.'<sup>43</sup> A consideration of Rossetti's convent

---

<sup>42</sup> Antony H. Harrison, 'Christina Rossetti and the Sage Discourse of Feminist High Anglicanism' in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. Thais E Morgan (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 87-104 (p. 96); D'Amico, *Faith Gender and Time*, p. 66; and Frederick S. Roden, 'Sisterhood is Powerful: Christina Rossetti's Maude', in *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture*, ed. by Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 63-77 (p. 63).

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Chapman, *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), p. 178.

poems, however, reveals that no such ‘seizing’ of her imagination is evident. As I will demonstrate, it is not her concern with historical realism that motivates her convent poems but her ongoing interest in mapping spiritual growth and with actively interpreting the Bible.

Rossetti has her speakers in ‘The Novice’ (*CP*, p. 671-2) and ‘Three Nuns’ (*CP*, p. 719-725) articulate their dissatisfaction with worldly confinement from positions of intense yearning and supernatural hope. Whilst the speaker of ‘The Novice’ laments her ‘weary life that looks for rest | Alone after death’s strife’ (lines 11-12), the first nun of ‘Three Nuns’ finds that whilst she awaits ‘the flush of Paradise’ her ‘heart sickens’ (lines 32, 34). Rather than simple expressions of melancholy, these heart-felt articulations are scripturally based and arise from an increasingly acute awareness of the contrast that the speaker’s perceive between earthly and heavenly existence.

In their discussion of the Park Village Sisterhood, Thomas Jay Williams and Allan Walter Campbell consider of the profound influence that Newman’s 1840 book, *The Church of the Fathers*, had on the establishment of Anglican convents. They claim that it was ‘read by at least two young women in whom it awakened a desire to dedicate themselves to God in the virgin state.’<sup>44</sup> In it, Newman contends that the purpose of ‘monasteries and monastic life’ is to enable believers to ‘serve God without distraction.’<sup>45</sup> The intention behind the establishment of the first Anglican sisterhood is remarkably similar in that, according to Burrows,

The object proposed was “to afford opportunities to persons, apart from the world and its distractions, to perfect holiness in the fear of God, and

---

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Jay Williams and Allan Walter Campbell, *The Park Village Sisterhood* (London: S.P.C.K, 1965), p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Church of the Fathers*, in *Historical Sketches*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906), ii, p. 63.

to grow in the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, especially by cherishing and showing forth love to His poor and afflicted brethren.” (Burrows, p. 16)

In my discussion of Rossetti’s interpretation of the Annunciation, I spoke of her emphasis on Mary’s courage in transforming herself into a mirror of Christ. In her convent poems, building on the concept that the Virgin Mary stands as a representative for the *choice* that the individual Christian must make as she allows herself to become infused with the Holy Spirit, she acknowledges the strength demonstrated by nuns who set out to empty themselves of self-interest and transform their lives into mirrors of their Creator.

As Newman demonstrates in *The Church of the Fathers*, the model upon which Anglo-Catholic convents were built had distinctly Roman Catholic origins. Indeed, Geoffrey Rowell notes that, amongst other things, ‘there was cross-fertilisation between Anglicans and Roman Catholics [...] in the influence of French religious orders on the rules of some of the new Anglican sisterhoods and communities.’<sup>46</sup> Like Harriet Brownlow Byron, the founder of All Saints Sisters of the Poor (the community to which Maria Rossetti was professed in 1874), most of the founders of Anglo-Catholics communities travelled widely across the continent visiting several Catholic orders for women before establishing their own.<sup>47</sup> In her ‘Memories’ of the community of All Saints, Sister Caroline Mary writes that ‘when preparing for her Life-work of founding,’ Brownlow Byron

stayed in one of the Convents of the Visitation- and was on cordial terms with the St. Vincent de Paul Sisters and with a Religious Community of ‘Mt. Sion’ who had Houses in Palestine. She knew one of the Nuns

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Rowell, ‘Introduction: 1830-2001,’ in *Love’s Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, ed. by Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 369-376 (p. 373).

<sup>47</sup> *All Saints Sisters of the Poor: an Anglican sisterhood in the nineteenth century*, ed. by Susan Mumm (Woodbridge : Boydell, 2001), p. xiii.

intimately and from her [...] gathered many 'customs' such as wearing a bride's dress when received as a Novice, the mode of giving the 'Kiss of Peace', Monotoning our Psalms at Lesser Hours, etc.<sup>48</sup>

It was precisely because of the adoption of these Roman Catholic customs that the new orders received ridicule and gave rise to what Susan Casteras terms, 'sensational and sentimental attitudes.'<sup>49</sup> Countering the recurring focus on the negative aspects of the overlap between Roman Catholic and Anglican orders, I want to highlight the areas where the 'cross-fertilisation' proved fruitful and contributed to the popularity and ongoing development of Anglican convents in Britain. Central to these areas, I suggest, is the willingness of the founders of new convents to embrace and implement Roman Catholic devotional and doctrinal literature.

As a reader of contemporary Tractarian writings, Rossetti was familiar with the mid to late nineteenth-century preoccupation with the translation and circulation of English translations of Roman Catholic devotional literature. E. Milner-White notes this preoccupation when he argues that the 'passion' of the Tractarian leaders 'to base their movement upon personal as well as corporate devotion, led at once to an emphasis on wider and better devotional reading.' By freely accepting the 'spiritual output of the Counter-Reformation, of St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis de Sales, Augustine Baker,' he argues that the Tractarian leaders revived and transformed the prayer life of England.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Yngve Brilioth recognises that 'in connection with the strong influence of recent Catholic piety [...] comes an increased intimacy' with Roman

<sup>48</sup> 'Memories of Sister Caroline Mary,' in Mumm, *All Saints Sisters*, pp. 3-64 (p. 16).

<sup>49</sup> Susan P. Casteras, 'Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices', *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1980-1), 157-184 (p. 157).

<sup>50</sup> E. Milner-White, 'Modern Prayers and their Writers,' in *Liturgy and Worship: A companion to the Prayer Books of the Anglican Communion*, ed. by W.K. Lowther Clarke, D.D. with the assistance of Charles Harris, D.D. (London: SPCK, 1932), pp. 749-762 (p.749-50).



mystics such as ‘Blasius [...] St John of the Cross, St. Theresa, Nouet [and] Scupoli.’<sup>51</sup>

In 1863, two of Rossetti's poems appeared in *Lyra Eucharistica: Hymns and Verses on the Holy Communion* which was edited by Tractarian theologian Orby Shipley. Also included in this volume is hymn writer E. Caswall's translation of ‘Vivo, fin vivir en mi’ or, ‘The Canticle of S. Teresa.’<sup>52</sup> Along with the fact that Littledale includes the second and twelfth verses of the poem in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and makes repeated mention of the ‘strenuous efforts’ that St. Teresa made in her reforms of the religious life (p. 231), Shipley's inclusion of ‘The Canticle’ indicates a Tractarian willingness to incorporate the writings of the medieval saint into the liturgy of the Anglican Church. Indeed, Shipley uses ‘The Canticle’ to open a collection of poetic reflections on ‘The Eucharistic Portion of the Divine Office.’

Ellen Moers claims that John Dalton's translation of St. Teresa's *Autobiography* in 1851 revived interest in the Spanish mystic among the Victorians and, in her study, *Mother of Carmel: A Portrait of St. Teresa of Jesus*, E. Allison Peers writes of how Dalton and Lewis began a ‘revival of interest’ in the saint in the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Added to this, following her examination of George Eliot's use of her *Autobiography* as a framework through which to understand Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, Hilary Fraser notes that St Teresa's writings were becoming increasingly well-known in the nineteenth century with

---

<sup>51</sup> Yngve Brilioth, *The Anglican revival, studies in the Oxford movement* (London; New York: Longmans, Green, 1925), p. 297.

<sup>52</sup> *Lyra Eucharistica: Hymns and Verse on the Holy Communion, Ancient and Modern; with other poems*, ed. by Orby Shipley, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Longman and Green, 1864), p. 244-248.

<sup>53</sup> Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1986), p. 315-6; E. Allison Peers, *Mother of Carmel: A Portrait of St. Teresa of Jesus* (London: S.C.M Press, 1945), p. 140.

a new edition of her 'Life' published in 1870 and a key reference to her contained within W.E.H. Lecky's *History of European Morals* in 1869.<sup>54</sup>

In the prelude to *Middlemarch*, Eliot speaks of St Teresa's 'epic life' and argues that the possibility of reforming a religious order enabled her to reconcile her 'self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self.' She suggests that 'later-born Theresas' are severely hampered in living out such an 'epic life' by a society which negates their education and their 'social lot.' 'Here and there,' she writes, 'is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness' is 'dispersed among hindrances.'<sup>55</sup> In the mid nineteenth century, the enthusiasm with which thousands of 'later-born Theresas' welcomed the establishment of Anglican convents suggests the rampant presence of a desire to reconcile despair with 'the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self.' Indeed, as I will demonstrate, it is this desire that motivates Rossetti's convent poems and underpins the emotional anguish her nuns suffer.

Evelyn Underhill suggests that the 'total oblation' required from the nun made the restoration of religious orders 'the greatest achievement of the Anglican revival when seen in spiritual regard.' This oblation, she writes, 'expresses in a living symbolism, the ideal consummation of all worship.'<sup>56</sup> William Dodsworth, the perpetual curate of Christ Church, speaks of the life of self-immolation that the nun is called to make when he argues that,

To live a holy and useful life is one thing, to live a life of self sacrifice is another. It is very awful [sic] to remember the service with which they

---

<sup>54</sup> Hilary Fraser, 'St. Theresa, St. Dorothea, and Miss Brooke in *Middlemarch*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 40 (1986), 400-411.

<sup>55</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1872; repr. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), p. 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (James Nisbet and Company, 1936; repr. Guildford: Eagle, 1991), p. 254.

are consecrated to God and to a life of *entire* self-renunciation. And yet unless there is something of painful labour, theirs is in many respects of worldly comfort a life much to be preferred to that of a governess, and which many might covet for its comfort. (italics in the original)<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, he feared that a well financed and secure home for life would be too comfortable and would attract the wrong sort of recruit while inhibiting the religious life of the devout.

In her 1849 novella, *Maude*, Rossetti narrates various responses to the news that a young girl, Magdalen Ellis, has entered her noviciate at a local ‘Sisterhood of Mercy.’ Telling her cousin Maude that she would ‘not like such a life,’ Mary complains,

They have not proper clothes on their beds, and never go out without a thick veil, which must half-blind them. All day long they are at prayers, or teaching children, or attending the sick, or making things for the poor, or something.<sup>58</sup>

In her ‘Canticle,’ Teresa suggests that the devout nun considers her hardships minimal when she compares them to the pain of seeing ‘His Majesty | In such base captivity’ (lines 5-6). As I will demonstrate, it is this focus on the eternal over the material that Rossetti suggests enables nuns to persevere in their vocation. Rather than lamenting over the ‘thick veil[s]’ that ‘half-blind’ them, her nuns express relief at being able to hide behind the cover of anonymity with their eyes sheltered from the world.

Focusing on the pain of living in a world where, according to Teresa, the ‘iron weight of misery’ chains the believer to earth (line 24); in ‘Three Nuns’ Rossetti articulates the courage and strength necessary for living in full

---

<sup>57</sup> William Dodsworth to E.B. Pusey, unpub. letter (9 September 1845), Pusey House, Oxford, quoted in Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1985) p. 65.

<sup>58</sup> Christina Rossetti, ‘Maude’ (1850), in *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, ed. by Jan Marsh (London: Everyman, 1994), pp. 251-274 (p. 261).

awareness of the chasm that separates Heaven from the world. According to William Michael,

The second section of this poem was the first written, standing then as a separate composition. The united poem was inserted into the prose tale Maude, the observation: "Pray read the mottoes [epigraphs]; put together, they form a most exquisite little song which the nuns sing in Italy.' When Maude was published in 1897, the poem was excluded 'on copyright grounds.'

The translations he gives the Italian epigraphs read; 'This heart sighs, and I know not wherefore,' 'It may be sighing for love, but to me it says not so,' and 'Answer me, my heart, wherefore sighest thou? It answers: I want God, I sigh for Jesus' (*WMR*, p. 460). Whilst Sharon Smulders indicates, 'These mottoes serve to translate the solitary experience of each nun into a communal form of religious expression,' the fact that, in all three, the heart is spoken of objectively as 'this' and 'it' underpins the model of self construction Rossetti offers.<sup>59</sup> As a result of their communality and their apparent objectivity, the epigraphs engage with the narrative of the poem by articulating the spiritual journey of the nuns as they transcend the confusion where they 'know not' their place, voice their uncertainties, and finally reach an understanding of the place described in Revelation 22:17 where they can integrate themselves fully in the biblical schema as they 'plead; and say | [...] "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come"' (lines 205, 207).

In her analysis of Revelation 22:17 in *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti writes that the Divine 'Fire' kindles the flame of the believer: 'and therefore from her spreading flame the hearer who hears likewise catches fire, and echoes and cries and cannot but cry "Come"' (*FD*, p. 542). She adds that 'This Call

---

<sup>59</sup> Sharon Smulders, 'Vocational Metaphors in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins,' *Victorian Poetry*, 29, (1991), 161-73, (p. 163).

which cries “Come” [...] is a call to refreshment, solace, overflowing plenty, boundless endless supply, sustenance of immortality’ (*FD*, p. 548). Considering her representation of the ‘overflowing’ joy of the believer who ‘cannot but’ express her desire, I want to suggest that, alongside the Augustinian notion whereby the higher the individual is taken towards the ‘fire’ of God, the easier their ascent becomes, Rossetti exemplifies the impetus behind the movement of ‘Three Nuns.’ It is the intense desire to transcend the confines of worldly existence and reach the place of ‘immortality’ and uninterrupted communion with God that motivates each of her nuns. Whereas the first nun asks that the Holy Spirit ‘come’ and ‘Shut out all the troublesome | Noise of life’ (lines 5, 6-7), the third nun articulates her desperation to respond to the gentle encouragement of the Holy Spirit and the Church. As the nun responds to the call by ‘sigh[ing] for Jesus’ (see above), her heart begins to enter into ‘a new life’ (line 156), thus rendering her former struggles and her present circumstances ineffectual.

Alongside her expression of longing that she ‘be dumb’ (line 7) to the concerns of the world, the first nun voices her determination to empty and transform herself.

Shadow, shadow on the wall  
 Spread thy shelter over me;  
 Wrap me with a heavy pall,  
 With the dark that none may see  
 Fold thyself around me come (lines 1-5)

Noelle Bowles notes how the strong trochaic rhythm of this verse emits the same passion as the famous declaration ‘Mirror, Mirror on the wall’ in *Snow White* and claims that in these lines Rossetti ‘rejects the invidious gaze of the tale’s original antagonist and replaces feminine competition with a desire to escape from the

“intruding eyes” of those who see, not what she is but what they wish to project upon her,’ namely the mistaken ideal of fulfilment in erotic love and worldly success.<sup>60</sup> Notwithstanding this, it is misreading to focus solely on the nun’s desire to conceal herself from the intrusive eyes of the world and the men who ‘saw and called me fair’ (line 23). Indeed, alongside her desire for concealment, the speaker also voices a need for ‘shelter’ (line 2) and isolation away from the ‘troublesome | Noise of life’ (lines 6-7). Earlier in the chapter, I spoke of Brennan’s theory of affective transmission and highlighted how, through it, Rossetti’s engagement with the model of selfhood whereby the individual is transformed through imbibing various sensory affects from those around her can be understood. With this in mind, the nun’s request that her eyes and her ears to be covered protected can be seen to indicate her fearfulness of becoming imbued with worldly concerns, causing her to lose her citizenship in Heaven.

Although the reasons that the speaker gives for entering the convent appear genuine, when her desire to be covered by shadows is considered in a biblical context, more deep-rooted spiritual factors emerge. Throughout the New Testament, the imagery of shadows is connected with the Holy Spirit. The fact that the speaker refers to the ‘shadow’ on the wall as plural and asks that it spread ‘thy’ shelter over her instead of *a* shelter (lines 1-2) suggests an engagement with the Holy Spirit rather than with any purely material shadowy form. In addition, by calling upon the shadow to ‘wrap,’ ‘fold,’ and ‘Shut out’ (lines 3, 5,6) she recognises its active presence. In *Called to be Saints*, Rossetti quotes from Luke 1:26 which records the angel’s words to Mary that the ‘Power

---

<sup>60</sup> Noelle Bowles, 'A Chink in the Armour: Christina Rossetti's 'the Prince's Progress,' 'A Royal Princess,' and Victorian Medievalism', *Women's Writing*, 12 (2005), 115-126 (p. 118).

of the Highest shall overshadow thee' (CS, p. 172). She also recognises the mention of protective shadows made in the Old Testament. The Beloved in The Song of Songs declares: 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste' (2:3). In *Annus Domini*, alongside a reference to this text, Rossetti alludes to Isaiah 25:4, 'For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.' In the prayer that follows, she conflates both verses:

O LORD Jesus Christ, our Shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall, save us, I implore Thee, under all stress of terrible temptation. Deliver us from rebellion of passion, seduction of the flesh, allurements of the world, provocations of the devil: deliver us from siege and from surprise, from our foes and from ourselves, O Lord. Amen.' (prayer no. 103)

Following this, she combines the 'Shadow of the Great Rock' spoken of in Isaiah 32:2 with Christ (prayer no. 125). The emphasis she places on needing deliverance from 'ourselves' provides each prayer with a sense of urgency.

Commenting on the Song of Songs 4:1, 'thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks,' Littledale notes a 'special reference to the delight of CHRIST in the purity of the Religious Life, the dove's eyes behind that veil which consecrated Virgins have worn since the infancy of the Church.' He then moves on to strengthen his mystical interpretation of the passage by quoting a section from the ancient English form for the bestowal of a veil at the profession of a nun:

Receive, Virgin of CHRIST, the veil, a token of virginity and chastity, whereby may the Holy Ghost come upon thee, and the power of the Highest overshadow thee against the heat of evil temptations, through the help of the same our LORD JESUS CHRIST. (Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs*, p. 145)

In Tract 80, 'On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge,' Isaac Williams writes of the self-abasement, arising from a sense of God's presence.

He quotes Pascal's claim, "This wonderful mystery, impenetrable to any mortal eye, under which God is pleased to shade His glories, may excite us powerfully to a love of solitude and silence, and of retirement from the view of the world."<sup>61</sup> Such retirement, he claims, emulates the retiring actions of Christ's own life. By 'drawing into the shade' of life, he asserts that the humble express the deep and true sense of religion (ibid., ii.7, p. 51). By repeatedly highlighting how the decision to allow the 'power of the Highest overshadow' one's self reflects the actions of Christ's own life, Rossetti highlights the perseverance and sacrifice that she perceives necessary to cross the 'Convent Threshold.'

In addition to imitating 'the retiring actions of Christ's own life,' by substituting the word 'shadow' for 'mirror' Rossetti's nun reflects on the divine erosion of her identity. However, rather than being eroded in a negative sense, her identity gradually erodes so as to allow Christ to possess her. By the second verse, the shadow has only reached her feet yet she bids it 'Rise and cover up my head' (line 9). In my discussion of Rossetti's later poem, 'Vigil of the Annunciation,' I considered how the image of Christ 'Compassing release, | Comforting with peace' (lines 8-9) serves to transcend the weariness of life. Formally exemplifying the movement from fast to feast whereby the weary wait of 'flesh and time' is balanced with the hopeful anticipation of the 'rest where strife and anguish cease' (lines 3, 10), Rossetti structures the poem so as to map out the journey from strenuous waiting and watching to spiritual fulfilment. Indeed, whereas the first three lines of the first verse and the first line of the second depict the time of waiting, the third and final verse is concerned entirely

---

<sup>61</sup> Isaac Williams, 'Tract 80: On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge,' in *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford*, 6 vols (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1841, iv, part 2, section 7, p. 50-1.



with the saints resting ‘well in safe keeping’ (line 12). Anticipating this structural balancing, in ‘Three Nuns,’ the speaker’s request that the shadow ‘Rise up’ can be understood as pertaining to a relationship with Christ that is based on the structural concept of typology where the salvation offered in the New Testament ‘rise[s] up’ and transcends the sense of weariness expressed by the preacher of Ecclesiastes and by Job in the Old. Added to this, the proclamation of the third nun that she has grown ‘to love what once | Had been so burdensome’ (lines 201-2) can be read so as to structurally ‘rise,’ offering a corrective typology to the ‘aching worse than pain’ (line 41) and the strength that ‘fails’ (line 111) that her counterparts express.

The third nun begins her monologue by exemplifying what Eliot refers to as the desire to reconcile ‘self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self.’ Incorporating the impulse to ‘rise’ within the analogies of the bird-song and the fountain, she laments,

My heart is as a freeborn bird  
Caged in my cruel breast,  
That flutters, flutters evermore,  
Nor sings, nor is at rest.  
But beats against the prison bars,  
As knowing its own nest  
Far off beyond the clouded West.

My soul is as a hidden fount  
Shut in by clammy clay,  
That struggles with an upward moan;  
Striving to force its way  
Up, through the turf, over the grass,  
Up, up into the day,  
Where twilight no more turneth grey. (lines 124-137)

In these two verses, it is the line, ‘As knowing its own nest’ (line 129) that serves as the key through which the meaning of the nun’s cry can be unlocked. Indeed, it is as a result of her increasing awareness of ‘the rapturous consciousness of life

beyond self' that she is able to recognise that presently, she is 'Caged' in a fleshy and worldly 'prison' (lines 125, 128). 'Knowing' that her home or 'nest' in Heaven remains 'Far off' (lines 129-30), her despair rises. In the following verse, her desperation to 'force' her way 'Up, up into the day' of revelation (line 134, 136) is made more apparent through the analogy of the fountain. This analogy is rooted in the language of the Song of Songs where, following the description of the Beloved as 'a fountain sealed,' the lover describes her as 'a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon' (4:12, 15). Typologically anticipating Jesus' promise of 'living water' and, ultimately, the 'blood and water' which flowed from his side after his crucifixion (John 4:10, 19:34), the lover's description hints at the prospect of eternal life void of pain where, according to Rossetti's nun, 'twilight no more turneth grey' (line 137). The notion that until that day, the believer must remain as 'a fountain sealed' both exemplifies the Tractarian preoccupation with the doctrine of Reserve and highlights the importance of the convent enclosure which, although figured as a 'prison' (line 128), protects and guards those inside from being negatively transformed by the world.

At the start of the section of devotional poetry which concludes her 1881 book, *A Pageant and Other Poems*, Rossetti includes two further convent poems, 'Soeur Louise de la Misericorde (1674)' (*CP*, p. 327-8) and 'An "Immurata" Sister' (*CP*, p. 328-9). After reflecting on the 'world of pain' (line 11) which renders her 'empty' (lines 19, 22), the speaker of 'An "Immurata" Sister' ends with the comforting reflection that 'soon it will be time to die' (line 24) before adding the coda:

Sparks fly upwards toward their fount of fire,  
Kindling, flashing, hovering:-

Kindle, flash, my soul; mount higher and higher,  
Thou whole burnt offering! (lines 25-28)

The notion that believers must submit to being ‘burnt’ (line 28) in order that they can be ignited by God and rise, ‘upwards toward their fount of fire’ (line 25), serves as the motivating force behind both poems and corresponds to the claim Neale and Littledale make in their commentary on Psalm 66:9 when they suggest that ‘the odour of a saintly life needs the divine fire to make its perfume known, as incense requires glowing coals to quicken its properties’ (*Commentary on the Psalms*, iii, p. 347). It also reflects back upon the imagery of striving to rise upwards in ‘Three Nuns’ and gives the metaphor of the bird and the fountain further typological meaning.

When ‘Soeur Louise de la Misericorde (1674)’ is read in the context of both the last verse of ‘An “Immurata” Sister’ and the book of Ecclesiastes, it takes on an eschatological dimension that is impossible to decipher from the poem alone. Its speaker ends with the lament

Oh vanity of vanities, desire;  
Stunting my hope which may have strained up higher,  
Turning my garden plot to barren mire;  
Oh death-struck love, oh disenkindled fire,  
Oh vanity of vanities, desire! (lines 16-20)

The preacher of Ecclesiastes recognises that all life is meaningless vanity if there is no understanding of God. He proclaims, ‘I made me great works [...] I made me gardens and orchards [...] And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them’ (2:4, 5, 10), recognising that his life would not have been so wasted had he relied on God rather than the world. Like him, Rossetti’s speaker laments that she might have ‘strained up higher’ (line 17) had she the inclination to search for more than was visible. As it was however, in turning the ‘garden plot’ of her soul to ‘barren mire’ (line 18), she had copied the preacher who, after cultivating his

own garden recognised that all was ‘vanity and vexation of spirit’ (2:11). Whist the preacher eventually speaks of the truth he discovers later on in life and articulates the lesson he has learnt, to ‘Remember now thy Creator’ (12:1), she seems to conclude on a more negative note. However, her utilisation of the words of Ecclesiastes, coupled with the fact that she has chosen to enter a convent indicates that she recognises that there is hope beyond her ‘death-struck love’ and ‘disinkindled fire’ (line 19). Furthermore, when her despair is considered alongside the last verse of ‘An “Immurata” Sister,’ a further dimension is added in the introduction of the notion that God can ‘kindle’ a soul which is offered to him as a ‘whole burnt offering’ (lines 27-28).

Anticipating the patterning of ‘Soeur Louise de la Misericorde (1674)’ and ‘An “Immurata” Sister,’ Rossetti’s 1847 poem ‘The Novice’ is structured so that its final verses offer typological resolution of its first. Indeed, whereas it begins by articulating a woman’s struggles to escape from the ‘fear-oppressed’ life of earthly love (line 10), it ends with a firm acknowledgement that life in the cloister is better than ‘a weary life, a hopeless life’ (line 9) outside. The final three verses read,

Then bring me to a solitude  
Where love may neither come nor go;  
Where very peaceful waters flow,  
And roots are found for food;

Where the wild honey-bee booms by;  
And trees and bushes freely give  
Ripe fruit and nuts; there I would live,  
And there I fain would die.

There Autumn leaves may make my grave,  
And little birds sing over it;  
And there cool twilight winds may flit  
And shadowy branches wave. (lines 21-32)

Interpreted in the context of Rossetti's hermeneutics, the line, 'There Autumn leaves may make my grave' (lines 29) appears in the positive light of Heaven. Certainly, considering Smulders' suggestion that as a 'self-emblem,' the figure of the novice offered Rossetti 'a unique possibility to unite vocational and spiritual goals' (Smulders, p. 162), the unflinching determination of the speaking subject reflects a strong integrated selfhood. Following Paul's precept that each believer must be 'dead with Christ' in order to also 'live with him' (Romans 6:8), the determination of the speaker and the reference to the grave can be contextualised when it is read alongside Pusey's instruction,

seek only to be "buried with Christ" from this world and its vanities, hidden in His Tomb, so that all the show and pomps of this world may but flit around us as unreal things, but not catch our gaze, nor draw our hears, which have been "buried with Him" and are now "risen with Him."<sup>62</sup>

Following this, rather than demonstrating a morbid desire to escape from the world through death, Rossetti's novice can be seen to actively and courageously seek protection from the temptations that beset her in the world. By actively choosing to seek refuge away from the false promises of love offered by the world, she resists being transformed by the spectacles that surround her and relies on the 'shadowy branches' (line 32) of Christ to protect her senses from corruption. Furthermore, by framing notions of enclosure and protection within a chiastic abba rhyme scheme, Rossetti uses the spatial dimensions of her poem to implicitly comment on the protection offered by the 'shadowy branches' of Christ and to emphasise the safety of securely remaining in the place 'Where love may neither come nor go' (line 22).

---

<sup>62</sup> Edward Pusey, 'The Hidden Life,' in *Sermons during the season from Advent to Whitsuntide* (1848), in *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, pp. 211- 215 (p. 213).

In her book, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain*, Susan Mumm speaks of the liminal position of the novice. At the end of a six month trial, she records that the community voted on the question of whether the postulant would be admitted to Clothing, and given her new name 'in religion,' thus becoming a novice.' Usually lasting from two to four years, she speaks of the struggle women faced in the novitiate period over the momentous decision of whether or not to commit their life to the sisterhood. Highlighting the importance of 'self-selection,' she claims that 'Novices were free to leave at any time.' Indeed, considering that All Saints seems to have retained about fifty percent of its aspirants, it would appear that the title of the novice by no means guaranteed the holder a future as a fully professed sister.<sup>63</sup> It is likely that Rossetti was drawn to the figure of the novice since, serving as a metaphor for all who live in 'that condition or aspect of eternity which consists with the possibility of probation' (*FD*, p. 278), her enclosed life exemplifies what it means to make the decision to forego selfish concerns and submit oneself to God. By choosing to use the voice of the novice to reconcile the despair of the 'empty world and empty I' ('An "Immurata" Sister,' line 22) with, what Eliot terms, 'the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self,' she highlights the difficulties of living in the world but remaining a citizen of Heaven. To conclude, I wish to suggest that it is Rossetti's negotiations with this difficulty that drive and shape each of her convent poems.

---

<sup>63</sup> Susan Mumm, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999), p. 22, 27, 28.

### Chapter 3: The Varieties of Religious Experience in 'From House to Home'

In her 1858 poem, 'From House to Home' (*CP*, p. 76-82), Rossetti describes visionary experiences in the context of the struggle for spiritual enlightenment. Investigating these experiences through the typological lens of the final sequence of *Verses*, 'Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims,' this chapter considers Rossetti's articulation of the act of finding, in Christ, the authentic glass upon which the Bible can be interpreted and a true understanding of trinitarian personhood constructed. Watching the saints sing 'a new song in the height' (line 169), the speaker of 'From House to Home' claims that they 'rose and rose' (line 173)

As tho' one pulse stirred all, one rush of blood  
Fed all, one breath swept thro' them myriad-voiced,  
They struck their harps, cast down their crowns, they stood  
And worshipped and rejoiced. (lines 177-180)

By depicting their ascension in terms of the 'pulse' of God the Father, the 'blood' of Christ the Son, and the 'breath' of the Holy Spirit, Rossetti highlights the basis upon which their identity as saints is established and their joy founded. In her commentary on St. John's vision of the elders 'cast[ing] their crowns before the throne' (Revelation 4:10), she writes that 'to wear crowns [is] a dignity [...] to cast down tributary crowns an enhanced dignity' (*FD*, p. 161). In chapter two, I spoke of her suggestion that when they offer themselves to God as a sacrifice, saints are able to, like the scent of 'roses' which 'flush rarest,' rise upwards towards Heaven ("I gave a sweet smell," *CP*, p. 454, line 1). In 'From House to Home' by implicitly conflating the scent of the rose with the act of rising and of casting down crowns (line 179), Rossetti emphasises the connection between the agony of sacrifice and the joy of salvation and anticipates her later

allusion in 'Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims' to the transformation of 'a tired face' into a 'happy rose content to wait for grace' ('The hills are tipped with sunshine,' *CP*, p. 524, lines 9-10).

In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri claims that Paradise consists of Nine Heavens. Exploring his depiction of these Heavens, Maria Rossetti discusses the process whereby each saint attains an 'immovable eternal seat in the ineffable Rose of the Empyrean.'<sup>1</sup> Contemplating the Ninth Heaven which, according to Dante, exists at the centre of the 'mystical White Rose,' she asks 'what should be hidden, and what withheld' from the souls that form the petals, 'seeing that they gaze into the Very Light, and that the multitude of the Heavenly Host as bees deposit amid their recesses the Peace and Glow brought down from the Bosom of God?' (ibid, p. 204-5). With Maria Rossetti's explication of the rose imagery of Dante's *Paradiso* in mind, I want to suggest that Rossetti's own poetic description of the saints as they 'rose and rose' can be seen to simultaneously highlight both their upward ascent to Paradise and their journey inwards towards their seats in the 'ineffable Rose of the Empyrean.'

Following her depiction of the upward and inward movement of the saints, the speaker of 'From House to Home' summarizes her own journey of transformation whereby she has had to renounce the 'glittering and frail' reflections of herself that appear in the 'white transparent glass' of her worldly 'castle' (lines 13-14). As a result of this renunciation, she is able to declare,

Altho' today He prunes my twigs with pain,  
Yet doth His blood nourish and warm my root:  
Tomorrow I shall put forth buds again  
And clothe myself with fruit.

Altho' today I walk in tedious ways,

---

<sup>1</sup> Maria Francesca Rossetti, *The Shadow of Dante* (London: Rivingtons, 1871), p. 201.



Today His staff is turned into a rod,  
 Yet I will wait for Him the appointed days  
 And stay upon my God. (lines 221-228)

The imagery of the tree, fruit, staff, and rod that Rossetti envisages here is deeply rooted in Scripture. Indeed, both verses recall the pattern of judgment and salvation that is presented in Ezekiel and Isaiah and allude to the promises given in Psalm 23. Considering the imagery in terms of Rossetti's later theological investigation into the development of trinitarian personhood; when the observation that 'His staff is turned into a rod,' and the instruction to 'wait for Him' (lines 226-7), is read alongside her later encouragement in 'If not with hope of life' (*CP*, p. 504-5) to 'Bleed on beneath the rod | Weep on until thou see' (lines 5-6), a new dimension can be illuminated. By adding the suggestion of 'bleeding' and 'weeping' to the warning that God instructed Ezekiel to deliver to the Israelites, 'And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant' (Ezekiel 20:37), Rossetti reads the Old Testament prophecy on an intimate and personal level. Reflecting this reading back onto 'From House to Home' means understanding its 'rod' (line 226) as a threshold beyond which freedom and salvation can be obtained in the establishment of the new covenant and recognising Rossetti's active engagement with patristic and medieval methods of exegesis.

In 1841 John Keble wrote 'Tract 89, On the Mysticism Attributed to the Fathers of the Church.' In this, he argues that 'every rod, staff or sceptre' mentioned in the Bible was, 'in the Fathers' judgment, a designed emblem of the Cross.'<sup>2</sup> Following this precept, in their commentary on patristic understanding

---

<sup>2</sup> John Keble, 'Tract 89, On the Mysticism Attributed to the Fathers of the Church,' in *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford*, 6 vols (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1841), vi, part 2, section 18, p. 24. Further references to this tract are given

of Psalm 23:2, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and staff comfort me,' John Mason Neale and Richard Frederick Littledale claim that

The rod and the staff together make the blessed Cross [...]. And it may well be said that, in our valley of the shadow of death, that Cross is to be our comfort on which our Lord passed through His own valley of misery.<sup>3</sup>

Read in the context of this suggestion, Rossetti's line, 'Today His staff is turned into a rod' (line 226) can be seen to illustrate the dynamics of divine 'comfort' whereby, according of in John 15:1-17, God, as supreme 'husbandman,' prunes his Church and rids it of any branches that fail to bear fruit so that can it peacefully 'abide' in Christ and find its salvation in the cross. Understanding 'From House to Home' in this way means aligning the pain that the subject experiences 'in the valley of the shadow of death' as God uses his 'rod' to prune her 'twigs with pain' (line 221), with Jesus' 'own valley of misery' and his anguish on the cross. In addition to transforming Ezekiel's image of passing under the rod and 'into the bond of covenant,' this interpretation also means reading the image of destruction given in Isaiah 10:33-4 in the light of the Incarnation; hence understanding the pronouncement that God 'shall lop the bough with terror [...] And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron,' with the sacrificial act of Christ in mind. As I have argued, this conflation of the individual with Christ lies at the heart of Rossetti's Tractarian-based deployment of mystical theology. Divided into seven parts, Keble's tract defines this deployment as it challenges the prevalent 'contemptuous wonder of modern

---

after quotations in the text citing the part, section, and page number and signified by the title 'Mysticism.'

<sup>3</sup> M. Neale and R.F. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Medieval Writers*, 4 volumes, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Joseph Masters and Co, 1869- 1883), i, p. 279. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text citing the volume and page number and signified by the title *Commentary on the Psalms*.

critics and philosophers' for numerous mystical interpretations and upholds the biblical authority upon which the Patristic Fathers based their allegorical understandings of Scripture and the natural world ('Mysticism,' ii.2, p. 15).

Understanding mystical interpretation as a form of extended typological reading, Keble recognises the Incarnation as the key to all biblical hermeneutics and encourages his readers to look beyond purely 'human criticism' and allow for the possibility of Divine guidance in their reading of the Bible ('Mysticism,' i.10, p. 14).

In *Time Flies*, Rossetti articulates her familiarity with Neale's 1856 book of translated medieval sermons when she writes,

DR. NEALE, in the Introduction to his "Medieval Preachers and Medieval Preaching," quotes from one of St. Augustine's Paschal Homilies the following curious mystical interpretation of the hundred and fifty-three Fishes of the Second Miraculous Draught:-

"This number signifies the thousand thousands of the Saints and of the faithful. But why did the Lord vouchsafe to signify by these figures the many thousands who shall enter into the kingdom of heaven? Hear why. Ye know that the Law was given by Moses to the people of God; and that in that Law the Decalogue forms the chief part... These ten precepts no man accomplishes by his own strength, unless he is helped by the grace of God. If therefore, none can fulfil the Law unless God assist with His Spirit, ye must remember that the Holy Ghost is set forth to us by the number seven... Since then, we need the Spirit to fulfil the Law, add seven to ten, and you have seventeen. How, if you count from one to seventeen, you obtain one hundred and fifty-three. I need not count this up for you; count it for yourselves, and reckon thus: one and two and three and four make ten. In like manner add up the other numbers to seventeen, and you will have the holy number of the faithful and of the saints that shall be in heavenly places with the Lord."

This same calculation St. Augustine, we are informed, repeated substantially in a second and again in a third sermon: whence we may infer that however quaint such comments may appear to some hearers to readers, in others they arouse interest and promote edification. (December 1; p. 229-230)

In her next entry, she expresses her commitment to Augustine's lesson, 'count it for yourselves,' when she suggests a different process of arithmetic in reaching the figure of one hundred and fifty-three. She instructs,

Multiply each commandment by the grace needed for its observance, one by seven; and this seven again by ten, the number of the commandments: and seventy appears.

Now as Joseph said to Pharaoh, “For that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established:” therefore we will express final perseverance by doubling seventy, and obtain one hundred and forty. But he who is wholly sanctified by God the Holy Ghost is truly owned and saved by the Most Holy Trinity in Unity: wherefore we place the Decalogue under favour of the Divine number Three; making up an additional thirteen. Which thirteen and hundred and forty added together amount to the required hundred and fifty-three. (December 2; p. 230-231)

Following these calculations, Rossetti nuances the questions that Keble asks when she contemplates, ‘are such speculations profitable, or are they trivial?’ (*TF*, December 3; p. 231). Whereas Keble responds to the question of the value of mystical interpretation by a lengthy discussion of biblical precedents (‘Mysticism,’ ii.12-19, pp. 17-26), Rossetti simply concludes that her calculations are profitable in so far as they ‘encourage any poor soul to tread the path of obedience.’ The mystical interpretations may effect obedience, she argues, because they testify that ‘election is certified, and final perseverance is achieved by one and the same process open to us all alike’ (*TF*, December 3; p. 231). By focusing on the precept of godly obedience, she emphasises the practical nature of mystical interpretation whereby the individual is empowered to foster a deeper relationship with God.

In the first two poems of ‘Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims,’ Rossetti negotiates her earlier investment in Neale’s biblical calculations when she highlights the lesson that divine love can never be fully comprehended by earthly means. In “Her Seed; It shall bruise thy head” she offers a re-visionary reading of Matthew 18:21-2 when she argues that since ‘Christ’s love’ outnumbers ‘ten times sevenfold seven,’ calculations and numbers cannot be applied to God (*CP*, p. 503, line 7). Likewise, in “Judge nothing before the time,” her image of the

‘dove | Silently telling her bead-history’ is suggestive of obedient calculation and humility in the knowledge that ‘We can but spell a surface history’ of God’s love (*CP*, p. 503, lines 8-9, 2). In chapter one, I suggested that, throughout *Verses*, Rossetti Christianises the poetic form of the roundel. With this in mind, the fact that she chooses to open ‘Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims’ with two roundels that juxtapose human understanding with divine love can be shown to indicate her investment in negotiating the circularity of the Christian journey and the non-linear dynamics of temporality.

Considering the mystical concern with the dynamics of temporality, Philip Sheldrake voices the popular scholarly opinion that patristic ‘mysticism is not to be confused with the later Western interest in subjective religious experiences.’<sup>4</sup> Focusing on the various ways in which ‘From House to Home’ bridges the chasm between the medieval and modern definitions of mysticism, I wish to indicate Rossetti’s Tractarian concern with negotiating both hermeneutical and psychological models. Departing from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s suggestion that the poem reflects Rossetti’s renunciation of ‘the self gratifications of art and sensuality,’ I propose that the quality of devout fortitude attained through the mystical experiences of the speaker should be understood in the framework of biblical typology explicated in the religious climate of the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Composed in 1901, only eight years after the publication of *Verses* and seven years after Rossetti’s death, William James’ lecture series, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, offers a coherent picture of this particular climate and draws on several of the sources,

---

<sup>4</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian living and the doctrine of God* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1998), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 571.

such as the writings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas a Kempis, with which she was familiar. In spite of Grace Jantzen's recognition that James' characterisation of mysticism 'bears little resemblance to what was considered important by those who are taken as the paradigm mystics of the Christian tradition,' I want to suggest that James' investigation shares many of the notions that can be found in writings of Keble and Neale and provides a useful tool through which to approach Rossetti's engagement with both the patristic theology of the Oxford Movement and her exploration of various states of consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas Keble begins Tract 89 with the claim that the term 'mysticism' has been stigmatized as something 'altogether remote from common sense and practical utility' ('Mysticism,' i.2, p. 4), James begins his lectures on the subject with the recognition that, 'The words 'mysticism' and 'mystical' are often used as terms of mere reproach, to throw at any opinion which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental, and without a base in either facts or logic.'<sup>7</sup> Moving on to establish their own particular definitions of the term (Keble in regard to the Patristic interpretation of Scripture, and James in regard to a study of particular states of consciousness), both argue that the ultimate endeavour of mysticism is to overcome the barriers between God and the individual soul. However, whereas Keble articulates a firm focus on Christ when he speaks of the 'trembling consciousness' that occurs in recognition of 'the invisible line which separates His agency from that of His rational creatures' ('Mysticism,' iv.15, p. 87), James articulates a more universal model and focuses on the psychological dimensions of the mystical experience. He writes that 'In mystic states we both become one

---

<sup>6</sup> Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Longmans, Green & co., 1901; repr. London: Penguin Classics, 1985) p. 379-380.

with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness' (James, p. 419). As I will demonstrate, the notion of the believer finding meaning and identity though and in God is the keynote of the speaker's mystical journey in 'From House to Home'. By reading her experience in the context of Tractarian theology and by mapping her journey onto the four characteristics that James suggests constitute a mystical experience; ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity (James, p. 380-2), it is my argument that the poem points to an understanding of the mystical as simultaneously combining both hermeneutical and subjective experiences.

#### **i. Ineffability**

According to James, 'ineffability' is the first characteristic of the mystical experience. He writes that,

The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect. No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists. (James, p. 380)

D.H.S. Nicholson and A.H.E Lee, who include two of Rossetti's poems ('Hymn, after Gabriele Rossetti' and 'After Communion') in their 1917 volume, *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*, speak of the ineffable nature of the mystical experience in more affirmative terms than James when they write that

The most essential part of mysticism cannot, of course, ever pass into expression, inasmuch as it consists in an experience which is in the most literal sense ineffable. The secret of the inmost sanctuary is not in danger of profanation, since none but those who penetrate into that sanctuary can understand it, and those even who penetrate find, on passing out again,

that their lips are sealed by the sheer insufficiency of language as a medium for conveying the sense of their supreme adventure.<sup>8</sup>

Their understanding that the ‘ineffable’ protects the ‘secret of the inmost sanctuary’ shares much in common with Isaac Williams’ explication of the doctrine of Reserve. Considering this doctrine alongside Rossetti’s positive approach towards those things that, in Nicholson and Lee’s terms, are too sacred to ‘ever pass into expression,’ I wish to challenge James’ conception of the ineffable and his construction of a binary distinction between ‘states of intellect’ and ‘states of feeling’ and suggest that, for the Tractarian theologian, the intellect serves as a vehicle for producing visionary experiences.

After describing the joy that she experienced as a result of constructing a ‘pleasure-place’ within her soul (line 6), the speaker of ‘From House to Home’ considers her relationship with the ‘one like an angel’ (line 45). She alludes to the ineffable nature of this relationship in her claim,

I have no words to tell what way we walked,  
What unforgotten path now closed and sealed;  
I have no words to tell all things we talked.  
All things that he revealed. (lines 57-60)

When James’ definition of the ‘negative’ classification of the ineffable is considered alongside the speaker’s cry, ‘I have no words to tell,’ and her reference to the ‘closed and sealed’ path (lines 57-8), it is rendered ineffectual. Williams suggests that the concealment of ‘sacred and important truths’ is grounded firmly in Scripture and serves to prevent those who are unprepared from receiving religious knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Emma Mason discusses what, for the Tractarians, was the ‘essential’ aspect of this practice in that ‘as a form of divine

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*, eds. by D.H.S. Nicholson and A.H.S. Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Isaac Williams, ‘Tract 80: On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge,’ in *Tracts for the Times* (see Keble, above), iv, part 1, section 1, p. 1.



power, religious knowledge was highly dangerous in the hands of the unbelieving who might misinterpret its truths, belittle God's mysteries, and so commit acts of profound blasphemy.'<sup>10</sup> Certainly, this understanding of Reserve corresponds to the articulation of the revelatory experience that the speaker offers in the latter part of 'From House to Home' and that Rossetti promotes throughout *Verses*.

Perhaps in contemplation of Revelation 2:17 where God promises, 'to Him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it,' the speaker of 'From House to Home' claims that 'No man could number them, no tongue disclose | Their secret sacred names' (lines 175-176). Her vision of the worshipping multitudes who have been blessed by God occurs in order that it might 'strengthen her soul again' (line 144). However, when read alongside Revelation's precept that 'no man knoweth saving he that receiveth,' it is implied that the cup 'Brim full of loathing and of bitterness' (line 146) which she saw the woman drink in preparation for her visionary experience, would have destroyed the individual who was not 'anchored fast in heaven' (line 140). Acting in much the same way as the 'rod' (line 226) with which, according to John 15:1-17, God 'prunes' his Church and destroys its unhealthy branches, the contents of the cup are simultaneously reviving and destructive.

Introducing the revelatory experience as simultaneously reviving and destructive, the first few verses of 'From House to Home' can be seen to be written in the Dantesque style of allegory in that they work on various levels, none of which are forced to collapse under one another. Hence they defy logical

---

<sup>10</sup> Emma Mason, 'Christina Rossetti and the Doctrine of Reserve', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 7 (2002), 196-219 (p. 202).

expression. In *The Shadow of Dante*, Maria Rossetti writes of Dante's 'elliptical and recondite' style. She claims that 'a first thought often lies coiled up and hidden under a second.' Those who never look beyond the surface, she suggests, are won over by gazing at the shadow of the second thought. Never having 'tasted the entrancement' of the poet's music, nor 'entered the depths' of the philosopher's cogitations, they are oblivious to any allegorical, moral, or analogical meaning (Rossetti, *A Shadow of Dante*, p. 3). In the context of 'From House to Home,' the oblivious readers Maria speaks of are those who embrace the 'tissue of hugged lies' but fail to perceive the 'second,' the 'ruin fraught with pain' (lines 9, 10). These are the readers, Rossetti suggests, who without the sustenance of a 'chain of living links' (line 138) binding them to heaven, are destroyed by the sharp thorns and the loathsome cup (lines 209- 10) of God's judgment. By modelling her poem after the Dantesque style of allegory that her sister explores, Rossetti encourages her readers to approach it through the typological framework whereby, as her later poetry illuminates her earlier verses, the second half of the narrative offers comment on the first. Considered in this way, the inexpressibility of the speaker's relationship with the 'one like an angel' (line 45) can be seen to be rooted in the sacred mysteries of the divine which are spoken of in the latter half of the poem.

Like his depiction of the ineffable as negative, James' bifurcation of 'states of feeling' from 'states of intellect' can be challenged by a consideration of the mystical experience within an apostolic framework. Indeed, when 'From House to Home' is considered in the context of the patristic theology that is mediated through the Tractarians, any distinctions that the reader might conceive between emotion and intellect can be diminished as modern or post-modern

edifices. For the Patristic Fathers, a mystical experience *demand*s a conflation of the intellect with the senses. In chapter two, I referred to the warning Rossetti elicits from Ecclesiastes, against believers using their bodily eyes carelessly. Following her vision, the speaker of 'From House to Home' maintains her adherence to this warning by engaging the senses in her contemplation of the divine revelation she is permitted to witness. Anticipating the final realisation of divine love, she recalls the wondrous vision she is given:

Then earth and heaven were rolled up like a scroll;  
Time and space, change and death, had passed away;  
Weight, number, measure, each had reached its whole;  
The day had come, that day. (lines 161-164)

This verse alone recalls numerous biblical allusions, most notably conflating Isaiah's prophecy, 'And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll' (Isaiah 34:4) with St. John's vision, 'the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places' (Revelation 6:14). By integrating into a tight structure the Old Testament prophecy, the New Testament revelation, and the speaker's own recognition that each measure 'had reached its whole' in Christ (line 160), Rossetti actively demonstrates her engagement with the hermeneutical process that the medieval preachers of Neale's volume so fervently encourage.

In Tract 89, Keble claims that there are two principles upon which the Fathers read the Bible; 'a hearty sense of the Communion of Saints, as a still subsisting bond of union between them and the Patriarchal and Mosaical ages,' and 'a deep and reverential sense of God's peculiar Presence and Interference through the whole of this history' ('Mysticism,' iv.15, p. 87). Although more pronounced in *Verses*, in the repeated image of faltering believers as they 'Sing

with all Saints' ("Whither the Tribes go up, even the Tribes of the Lord," *CP*, p. 506, line 16), both of these principles can be seen to operate in 'From House to Home'. Indeed, the 'chain of living links not made nor riven' (line 138) that anchor the speaker's counterpart to heaven corresponds to the chain that Keble speaks of as binding the Communion of Saints into one body through history, making 'the whole a series of links, binding the old dispensations to the new' ('Mysticism,' iv.21, p. 96-7). Taken as such, the recognition that 'one breath swept thro' them myriad-voiced' (line 178), can be understood to anticipate Rossetti's articulation, in her 'Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims' sequence, of becoming assimilated into the Community of Saints through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In 'A heavy heart, if ever heart was heavy' (*CP*, p. 513), Rossetti expresses a hope of singing 'amid the bevy | Of thousand thousand choirs' (lines 13-4). Following this, in "Heaviness may endure for a night, but Joy cometh in the morning" (*CP*, p. 533-4), she voices her incorporation in 'all creation' (line 15) when she declares,

While all creation sang its hymn anew,  
 What could I do but sing a stave in tune?  
 Spectral on high hung pale the vanishing moon,  
 Where a last hint of stars hung paling too.  
 Lark's lay- a cockcrow- with a scattered few  
 Soft early chirpings,- with a tender croon  
 Of doves,- a hundred thousand calls, and soon  
 A hundred thousand answers, sweet and true.  
 These set me singing too at unawares:  
 One note for all delights and charities,  
 One note for hope reviving with the light,  
 One note for every thing that is;  
 Till while I sang my heart shook off its cares  
 And revelled in the land of no more night. (lines 15-28)

The notion that the echoing and calling of the doves ‘set’ the speaker ‘singing too at unawares’ (line 23), reflects Rossetti’s understanding of the deep transformation of the individual through a collaborative and imbibing relationship with God and with the Communion of Saints. Indeed, her speaker’s desire to lose her individual voice within divine communion highlights her transformed vision of personhood and her receptiveness and openness to existing, not as a single unit, but as a part of a larger community where, ‘catching the flame’ of the Holy Spirit, she ‘cannot but’ express her love (*FD*, p. 542).

Continuing to develop my investigation into Rossetti’s engagement with the liturgical practice of psalmody, I wish to highlight her poetical deployment of the antiphon. In his dissertation on ‘The Psalms as Employed in the Offices of the Church,’ recognising that the same Psalm, when repeated at different festivals could not always be recited with the same feelings and in the same frame of mind, Neale notes that the repetition of an antiphon enables its different emphasis to be brought out. He writes that an antiphon, ‘in the original sense of the word, was the intercalation of the some fragment or verse between the verses of the Psalm which was then being sung: one choir taking the Psalm, the other, the intercalated portion.’ This practice, he argues, allows for the various significations of a particular Psalm to be temporarily ‘fixed at one: which struck the right key-note and enabled the worshipper to sing with the spirit and to sing with the understanding also.’ More than the chanting of Psalms, he argues that the system of repeating antiphons is of ‘venerable antiquity’ since according to Socrates it was introduced by S. Ignatius who, in a vision, had heard the chanting of antiphons in the Church of heaven’ (*Commentary on the Psalms*, i, p. 34-5).

Allusions to the practice of psalmody and the singing of antiphons can be identified throughout 'From House to Home.' Discussing the relationship she enjoyed with her companion, the speaker claims, 'We sang our songs together by the way | Calls and recalls and echoes of delight' (lines 53-54). Although these lines do not directly relate to the singing of the Psalter, a consideration of them alongside the latter part of the poem suggests a correspondence. In her articulation of the vision of the woman in the space where 'Night and new morning strive for domination' (line 118), the speaker recalls,

Her lips and cheeks waxed rosy-fresh and young:  
 Drinking she sang: "My soul shall nothing want:"  
 And drank anew: while soft a song was sung,  
 A mystical slow chant. (lines 153-156)

Together with the allusion to Psalm 23:1, 'The Lord is my shepherd: therefore *can I lack nothing*' (emphasis mine), the fact that a 'mystical slow chant' (line 156) is sung alongside the recitation of the Bible verse strongly suggests an echoing of the ecclesiastical practice encouraged by the Prayer Book Psalter. Considering the further link made between the woman's restorative drink and the cup that 'shall be full' in Psalm 23:5, this correspondence is strengthened. In chapter one, I discussed Rossetti's depictions of the Church organ and highlighted the way in which her poetry demonstrates how the ritualistic practices of High Anglicanism offer 'vibrations' of Heaven. In 'From House to Home,' by echoing the language of the church service in her depiction of a mystical experience, Rossetti is able to express this doctrine further and demonstrate how the very language of the Bible exists in the eternal and transcendent realm of Heaven. In the final words of the poem, she reinforces the link to Psalm 23 as she speaks of its 'rod' and 'staff' (line 226) and highlights the need to 'stay upon' God (line 228).

In her 1580 book *Interior Castle*, which tells of the seven stages of union with God, St. Teresa of Avila's discussion of the 'soul's own faculty of hearing' can be seen to correspond to the experience of Rossetti's speaker who hears and responds to the 'song | Of spheres and spirits' (lines 105-6) and the 'mystical slow chant' of the saints (line 156).<sup>11</sup> According to James, 'Saint Teresa is the expert of experts' in describing the mystical experience' (James, p. 408). Bearing in mind the 'revival of interest' in the saint in the nineteenth century; it is likely that Dalton's translation of *Interior Castle* in 1852, the second translation of the book into English, was widely read and, considering her intellectual engagement with devotional literature, it is likely that Rossetti would have come across it.<sup>12</sup>

When considered alongside *Interior Castle*, Rossetti's utilisation of the rhetorical devices of humility, irony, and obfuscation in 'From House to Home' can be read more succinctly as creative solutions to the difficulties of positioning herself as both a woman and a Tractarian theologian rather as indications of a failure to engage with the intellectual progress from uncertainty to knowledge that the spiritual journey entails. In her book, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, Alison Weber demonstrates how, in asserting her authority, St. Teresa muffles her more controversial and challenging messages within an overtly 'feminine' discourse abounding with diminutives and self-depreciation.<sup>13</sup> This technique is not unlike the one used in *The Face of the Deep* when Rossetti obscures her insightful observations on the proper glory of the moon by accompanying them with the self-deprecating remark 'I trust such a train of

---

<sup>11</sup> St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, ed. by E. Allison Peers (1580; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961; repr. Image Edition: Doubleday, 2004), p. 138. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and signified by the title *Interior*.

<sup>12</sup> E. Allison Peers, *Mother of Carmel: A Portrait of St. Teresa of Jesus* (London: S.C.M Press, 1945), p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1990) p. 16.

thought is permissible' (p. 215). Although, unlike Teresa, Rossetti did not have a death threat hanging over her for interpreting the scriptures, she recognises that her authority has the potential of being hampered by her gender and, whilst she was not commanded to write by any human organisation, she makes it clear that she felt divinely inspired by God to do so. She was placed in a difficult position in that whilst she felt spiritually obliged to use her God-given gifts to enlighten her readers in their understanding of Revelation, she was obliged to publish *The Face of the Deep* under the 'direction of the tract committee' (FD, title page) and consistently declare her humility and the 'avowed ignorance' that she anticipated would be attributed to a female encroaching on a man's domain (FD, p. 153).

As an 'introspective dialect', Weber writes that Teresa's 'rhetoric of humility becomes a meta-communicative statement' about the double bind of her position, 'delineating its paradoxes and affirming the existence of a justifying order beyond the power of its field' (p. 76). Applying this argument to Rossetti's writings involves reading her tentative self-deprecating statements as part of a political strategy. Like Teresa, Rossetti valorises her rhetoric of humility by rooting it in Divine precepts. She writes that 'To humble ourselves, to repent, to stand alert at the rumour of a Divine message, such acts as these lie within our own power; acts whereby we can all please God.' As saints 'bemoan' their unworthiness in the face of God, so too, she suggests, should believers always look to the Bible and to God rather than themselves for the basis upon which to establish their authority (FD, p. 167-8).

One of the ways in which 'From House to Home' conforms to a style that Weber considers particularly feminine is through its framework of an improvised oral conversation. In the second verse, the speaker addresses the queries of a



curious friend as she describes the ‘pleasure-place’ (line 6) that she constructed within her soul. The friend’s seemingly impromptu question, “what was this thing and where?” (line 5) can be likened to the many other instances of dialogue that can be identified throughout *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. For example, in ‘My Dream’ the speaker enters into an oral dialogue with her listener, saying, ‘What can it mean? you ask. I answer not | For meaning, but myself must echo, what?’ (CP, p. 33-4, lines 49-50). Likewise, in ‘Winter: My Secret,’ the speaker enters into a conversation with her listener, chastising her with the words ‘you’re too curious: fie!’ (CP, p. 41, line 4). Also, in ‘Up-hill,’ the answers given to the persistent questioner are addressed to ‘my friend’ (CP, p. 59-60, line 4). A similar format of dialogue between a curious enquirer and a reassuring friend can be seen in *Interior Castle*. Throughout, St Teresa lists questions which she then proceeds to answer. In her introduction, she recalls,

I was told by the person who commanded me to write that, as the nuns of these convents of Our Lady of Carmel need someone to solve their difficulties concerning prayer and as (or so it seemed to him) women best understand each other’s language, and also in view of their love for me, anything I might say would be particularly useful to them. For this reason he thought that it would be rather important if I could explain things clearly to them and for this reason it is they whom I shall be addressing in what I write [...] If I am successful in anything that I may say, they will of course understand that it does not come from me. (*Interior*, p. xxiv)

Teresa suggests that it is only by God’s grace that she is able to speak of the mystical journey of the soul at all. Ineffable in the sense of the Tractarian belief that the Bible is incomprehensible to the uninitiated, her articulation of the journey can be aligned to that spoken of in ‘From House to Home’ in that it demonstrates the vessel-like qualities of the speaker.

In the introduction to her anthology, *Medieval Women Writers*, Katharina M. Wilson argues that the female mystic ‘is depicted (and frequently depicts

herself) as a vessel of divine inspiration, not as a creative genius.’ For instance, she notes that ‘Hildegard of Bingen persistently refers to herself as a ‘trumpet’ that simply purveys sounds- God himself is the player.’<sup>14</sup> Throughout *Verses*, Rossetti does not consider the properties of the spiritual vessel to be particularly feminine. However, she does voice her belief in the empowering potential of becoming conduits of divine grace. In her sonnet, ‘St. Barnabas,’ she speaks of St. Paul as ‘That chosen Vessel, who for Jesus’ sake | Proclaimed the Gentiles and the Jews at one’ (CP, p. 447, lines 3-4). I want to suggest that reading ‘From House to Home’ with this image in mind means interpreting the simile, ‘Her eyes were like some fire-enshrining gem,’ as an indication of the woman’s vessel-like qualities (line 121). Indeed, Rossetti uses it to suggest that as she offers herself as vessel willing to be transformed by Divine fire, the believer is emptied of selfish concerns and filled with the ‘stately’ and ‘tender’ (line 122) presence of God.

In the preface to his 1847 translation of the 1669 classic, *The Foundations of The Spiritual Life* by French Jesuit Père Jean-Joseph Surin, Edward Pusey demonstrates his willingness to humble himself and act as God’s vessel. He expresses an eagerness to enter the world and thoughts of the ‘older mystics’ and claims that contemporary believers have much to learn from contemplating of the avowed ‘humility’ of the lives of the Saints. Furthermore, he encourages believers to follow in the path of St. Teresa of Avila and reflect upon her declaration that she is the ‘most useless person in the world.’<sup>15</sup> In a sermon on the virtues of humility, Pusey emphasises the importance of the lesson, ‘Know thyself [...] keep ever present with thee the knowledge of thine

<sup>14</sup> *Medieval women writers*, ed. by Katharina M. Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) p. xvii, xxvi.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Bouverie Pusey, ‘Preface,’ in Père Jean-Joseph Surin, *The Foundations of The Spiritual Life: Drawn from the Book of the Imitation of Jesus Christ*, trans. by Edward Bouverie Pusey (London: John Henry Parker, 1847), p. 11.

own infirmity.’<sup>16</sup> Perhaps with Teresa’s proclamation in mind, in a letter to Keble in 1844, he demonstrates the extent of his humility in his claim that,

My dear wife's illness first brought to me, what has since been deepened by the review of my past life, how, amid special mercies and guardianship of God, I am scarred all over and seamed with sin, so that I am a monster to myself; I loathe myself; I can feel of myself only like one covered with leprosy from head to foot; guarded as I have been, there is no one with whom I do not compare myself, and find myself worse than they.<sup>17</sup>

In a discussion of Pusey’s ‘discovery of compunction as the gateway to life,’ Benedicta Ward notes that this section of his letter seems to ‘be a paraphrase of’ the writings of Anselm of Canterbury, a translation of whose prayers and meditations was published with an introduction by Pusey in 1866.<sup>18</sup>

Investigating the possibility that Rossetti ‘became a Puseyite of sorts,’ Mason notes a similarity between Pusey’s acknowledgements of unworthiness and Rossetti’s own disclosures.<sup>19</sup> In 1881, Rossetti wrote a letter to her dying brother, Dante Gabriel:

I want to assure you that, however harassed by memory or anxiety you may be, I have (more or less) heretofore gone through the same ordeal. I have borne myself till I became unbearable to myself, and then I have found help in confession and spiritual counsel, and relief inexpressible. (*Letters*, ii, p. 311; 2 December 1881)

---

<sup>16</sup> Edward Bouverie Pusey, ‘Parochial Sermons II’ (1878), in *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, ed. by Owen Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 210.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Bouverie Pusey, letter to John Keble, St. Cyprian’s Day (Sept. 26, 1844), in Henry Parry Liddon, *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, 1894), ii, p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> *Prayers and Meditations to the Holy Trinity and our Lord Jesus Christ*, by St. Anselm of Canterbury, Preface by Edward Bouverie Pusey (Oxford and London: J.H. Parker, 1856). Discussed in Benedicta Ward, ‘A Tractarian Inheritance: The Religious Life in a Patristic Perspective’ in *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers*, ed. by Geoffrey Rowell (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986), pp. 214-225 (p. 221).

<sup>19</sup> Emma Mason, ‘“A Sort of Aesthetico-Catholic Revival.” Christina Rossetti and the London Ritualist Scene’, in *Outsiders Looking in: The Rossettis Then and Now*, ed. by D. Clifford and L. Roussillon (London: Anthem Press, 2004) pp. 115-130 (p. 119).

In spite of Mason's discussion of Pusey's influence over Rossetti, there still remains a critical gap in that Rossetti's devotional poetry and prose has yet to be considered alongside the discourses upon which Pusey's theology is built.

Although my analysis works towards filling this gap, much more needs to be done to establish Rossetti's very active engagement with the Tractarian practice of looking to patristic, medieval, and Counter-Reformation writings for guidelines upon which to interpret and apply the teachings of the Bible.

## **ii. Noetic qualities**

In his investigation of the noetic qualities of mystical states, William James claims that

Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, with them a curious sense of authority for aftertime. (James, p. 367)

The mystical experience described in 'From House to Home' fits James' description of the noetic state in that, through it, the speaker gains 'insight into depths of truth' and, as a result, is able to declare that although the thorns of the world are sharp, she 'can tread on them' (line 209). She describes her flash of divine insight in the following terms:

So while I lay entranced a curtain seemed  
To shrivel with crackling from before my face;  
Across mine eyes a waxing radiance beamed  
And showed a certain place.

I saw a vision of a woman, where  
Night and new morning strive for domination;  
Incomparably pale, and almost fair,  
And sad beyond expression.

Her eyes were like some fire-enshrining gem,

Were stately like the stars, and yet were tender;  
 Her figure charmed me like a windy stem  
 Quivering and dropped and slender. (lines 117-124)

Immediately after performing the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand and lamenting that his disciples still 'do not understand' why he is come (Mark 8:21), Mark's gospel relates how Jesus healed a blind man.

And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. (Mark 8: 23-25)

In 'From House to Home,' Rossetti follows the pattern of this gospel narrative by emphasising the notion that it is only by God's grace that clear vision can be attained and the 'certain place' (line 119) of revelation reached. By depicting the vision of the 'woman' (line 120) in terms of a 'windy stem' (line 123), she implicitly recalls the blind man's initial step towards healing as he sees 'men as trees, walking.'

In her discussion of 'Goblin Market,' Dolores Rosenblum speaks of Laura's regeneration of 'her own fruit-bearing tree of life' and suggests that, 'As a natural symbol for the integrated self, the tree is especially appropriate because it is the most extensive exfoliation of the seed; because it both earthbound and sky-directed; because it is both vulnerable and strong; in struggling upward it risks being buffeted or felled.'<sup>20</sup> In spite of the proliferation of tree metaphors throughout her early poetry, I would like to suggest that it is not until the composition of 'Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims' that Rossetti is able to *fully* exemplify the notion of the tree as a representative symbol of selfhood.

---

<sup>20</sup> Dolores Rosenblum, *Christina Rossetti: the Poetry of Endurance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 101.

Interpreting the effects that the changing seasons have on the constitution of trees, the second verse of her poem, 'A heavy heart, if ever heart was heavy' (*CP*, p. 513) reads,

Time was I bloomed with blossom and stood leafy  
How long before the fruit, if fruit there be:  
Lord, if by bearing fruit my heart grows heavy,  
Leafless and bloomless yet accept of me  
That stripped fruit-bearing heart I offer Thee. (lines 6-10)

Bearing in mind both the biblical narrative of the healing of the blind man and the notion of the tree as a metaphor for a developing selfhood, I want to suggest that it is through initiating an engagement with patristic models of interpretation that 'From House to Home' is able to engage with the mystical properties of the tree as a way of exemplifying the dynamics of the noetic state. Indeed, reading 'From House to Home' in terms of the dynamics of spiritual growth depicted in 'A heavy heart, if ever heart was heavy' means aligning the 'pleasure-place' (line 6) of the earlier poem with the blossoming and leafy tree (line 6) of the latter, and aligning the 'biting frost' (line 86) which renders the speaker of 'From House to Home' 'stunned with pain' (line 89) with the tree's struggle to bear fruit through the winter season. In her analysis of 'From House to Home,' Mason reads the 'avalanche' which turns the speaker's 'summer back to snow' (lines 77-8) as representative of the 'white wintry presence of the Christian God.'<sup>21</sup> She argues that the stability that marks of the end of the poem 'comes about because the narrator is willing to learn [...] what God promises in heaven' and is subsequently 'able to interpret winter as heaven's shadow' (*ibid*, p. 269).

Developing her spiritual interpretation of winter as heaven's shadow, in 'Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims,' Rossetti repeatedly uses the metaphor of

---

<sup>21</sup> Emma Mason, 'Religious Intellectuals : The Poetic Gravity of Emily Bronte and Christina Rossetti' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2000), p. 266.

coldness to articulate the ways through which God prepares the individual for incorporation into the Communion of Saints. In 'Marvel of marvels' (*CP*, p. 506-7), she exemplifies the concept of existing in a shadowy land when she speaks of how believers live 'in darkness and cold,' trembling as they await the 'midnight cry, the rapture, the tale untold' (lines 8-9). Similarly, in "Endure hardness" (*CP*, p. 505), by implicitly likening the 'cold wind' (*CP*, p. 505) to the Holy Spirit and the 'blackthorn' (lines 1, 8) to the individual, she highlights the positive effects of hardship in that it enables the soul to grow stronger and to 'blow' (lines 2, 8), spreading grace as it trembles before the power of God.

As writers who were, to some extent, shaped by their readings of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, it is unsurprising to find that a central motif in both Teresa's and Rossetti's writings is the pursuit of self-knowledge. Indeed, in 'From House to Home,' it is only as the 'spheres and spirits' (line 106) who 'Make her see' (line 109) and cause the 'curtain' (line 118) that is blinding her to be taken away that Rossetti's speaker is able to glimpse a vision of the 'woman' (line 120) who represents herself. I would like to suggest that it is the description of this woman as a 'windy stem' (line 123) that reinforces the link between the speaker who lays 'entranced' (line 117) and her counterpart. Through this description, Rossetti not only engages with the metaphor of the tree as a 'symbol for the integrated self' and recalls the biblical allusion of 'men as trees,' but she also engages with the ongoing typological metaphor of Christ as the 'tree of life' from which 'him that overcometh' will eat (Revelation 2:7). In the fifth verse of 'From House to Home,' the speaker describes how her 'pleasauance was an undulating green, | Stately with trees' (lines 17-18). By depicting the woman of her speaker's vision in terms of a tree and by describing her 'stately' eyes (line

121), Rossetti imitates the typological and mystical structure of Scripture that works on various levels. With renewed vision, she has the speaker recognise that the trees she once valued are worthless in comparison to those that are nurtured on 'the inner ground' (line 126) of Heaven. Indeed, the fact that the trees in her 'pleasauance,' initially 'full of songs and flowers and fruit' (line 26), fail to withstand the destructive purifying process renders them obstacles blocking the path of salvation. In order to move beyond these obstacles and grasp the salvation she has been offered, the speaker concludes that she must integrate herself into the noetic revelation she is given. Thus, she places herself in the position of the woman in her vision by insisting that although 'today I fade as doth a leaf [...] | Tomorrow I shall put forward buds again | And clothe myself with fruit' (lines 219, 223-4).

Anticipating Rossetti's depiction of the self as faded leaf and the weather beaten branch, Teresa states that one of her aims in writing is to help herself and her readers come to an understanding of 'how glad Our Lord is when we get to know ourselves' and to 'keep trying all the time to realize our poverty and wretchedness, and to reflect that we possess nothing that we have not been given' (*Interior*, p. 55). As a manifestation of the notion of emptying oneself and feeding upon God's grace, she writes that God comes to the soul by means of apparitions when it is afflicted, when it is about to be visited by some heavy trial, or when God may take delight in it and, at the same time, may comfort it' (ibid. p. 193). In the case of 'From House to Home', all three explanations fit: the speaker is heavily afflicted by the departure of her companion, the subsequent appearance of the tormented woman suggests she is about to be visited by heavy



trials, and God's intention to offer comfort to her in her present sufferings is demonstrated by repeated references to the promises recorded in the Bible.

Teresa describes the comforting and restorative visions that God offers as 'locutions.' She claims that the signs of a true locution include: the sense of power and authority which it bears, the great tranquillity that results and begins to dwell in the soul with the subject eager to constantly worship God, and the fact that the experience does not vanish from the memory for a long time. After the soul has experienced a true locution in the form of a spiritual rapture or a vision, she claims that for it 'to live on earth is a great affliction' and writes,

If it sees any of the things which used to give it pleasure, it no longer cares for them. Just as tokens of the nature of the Promised Land were brought back by those whom the Israelites sent on there, so in this case the Lord's wish seems to have been to show the soul something of the country to which it is to travel, so that it may suffer the trails of this trying road, knowing whither it must travel in order to obtain its rest (*Interior*, p. 157).

The fact that, as a result of her vision, Rossetti's speaker comes to understand her life on earth as an affliction existing 'with the possibility of probation' (*FD*, p. 278) indicates that her experience can be understood in terms of the locutionary encounter that Teresa identifies in *Interior Castle*. Furthermore, recognising that although she is a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth and fades 'as doth a leaf' (line 219) as she walks 'in tedious ways' (line 225), the speaker highlights the strength that her visionary locution endows her with, enabling her to endure the suffering that is a necessary part of the process of obtaining ultimate salvation. In her later poem 'ADVENT' (*CP*, p. 420) Rossetti represents the coming of the Kingdom of God as the time when 'life' will 'burst thro'' the 'mould' of the cold earth (lines 8,9). Anticipating its deployment of the 'fire' which lays 'unfelt [and] unseen' beneath the 'crust' of the earth ('ADVENT,' lines 2,3), the description,

in 'From House to Home', of the 'curtain [...] shrivel[ling] with cracking' before the face of the speaker in order that she may glimpse the 'waxing radiance' of the 'place' of heaven (lines 113-6) can be seen to use the individual locution as a means of envisaging the final, universal, eschatological phenomenon.

Instead of completely relinquishing her 'pleasure-place' (line 6), a reading of 'From House to Home' through the lens of *Interior Castle* indicates that the speaker moves through and past it as she makes the journey towards ultimate fulfilment in Christ. After allowing her heart and spirit to break as she falls 'on the frost-bound floor' (line 102), she suggests that her 'house of lies' will be 'cast down but not destroyed' (lines 202, 204). It cannot be utterly destroyed whilst she is still a spiritual pilgrim since it represents part of her soul that she has to pass through in order to glean a better understanding of her own trinitarian personhood. Indeed, it is only once she has transcended the 'certain place' (line 116) of her vision and reached the 'distant place' (line 208) of Heaven that she is able to 'pluck down' (line 207) and destroy her previous dwelling.

Images of flames and fire permeate 'From House to Home' to such an extent that they become enigmatic signifiers which can best understood in the contextual framework of Rossetti's entire corpus. Following the description of her castle 'kindling into fire' (line 16), the speaker allows her memory to be drawn back and comforted by a remembrance of the 'glimpses' she had 'of smooth garden-beds between' the trees of her 'pleasurance' (lines 17, 19). Moving abruptly away from the figuration of 'fire' as a merely destructive force, she likens these 'garden-beds' to 'flame or sky or snow' (line 20). As the poem progresses, the references to flames and fire begin to carry an increased spiritual

import. For instance, the suffering woman has eyes 'like some fire-enshrining gem' (line 121) and the multitudes of the faithful are seen rising up to God as 'flames with flames' (line 174).

St. Augustine uses the metaphor of fire to discuss the process whereby the believer is being 'inflamed' and 'kindled' by God's love.<sup>22</sup> In *Interior Castle*, Teresa utilises and builds upon Augustinian metaphors of fire as she interprets various aspects of the Christian experience. In her discussion of the 'enkindling' of the will, she writes that

The soul is desirous of employing itself wholly in love and it would be glad if it could meditate on nothing else. But this it cannot do even if it so desires; for, though the will is not dead, the fire which habitually kindles it is going out, and, if it is to give off heat of itself, it needs someone to fan it into flame. Would it be a good thing for the soul to remain in that state of aridity, hoping for fire to come down from Heaven to burn up this sacrifice of itself which it is making to God as did our father Elias. No [...] nor is a good thing to expect miracles (*Interior*, p. 171).

She argues that the soul must not just wait for a fire to come down from heaven to fan its desire into flame. It must, like the beloved in the Song of Songs, take action and do everything it possibly can to come to its own aid. This act of active determination is described by Rossetti in 'Goblin Market' (*CP*, p. 5-20) when Laura reclaims and reignites her spirituality by clinging to and kissing Lizzie. As a result, 'Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at her heart, | Met the fire smouldering there | And overbore its lesser flame' (lines 507-8). Understood in conjunction with 'From House to Home,' the 'lesser flame' that was consuming Laura's vitality can be seen as the 'fire' which demolishes the speaker's castle ('From House to Home,' line 16). Hence, the 'swift fire' which regenerates rather than destroys can be aligned to the representation of the Communion of

---

<sup>22</sup> St Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine Revised from a Former Translation*, trans. by Edward Pusey (Oxford, John Henry Parker: J.G.F. and J. Rivington, London: 1843), book xiii, part 9, section 10, p. 282.

Saints as ‘flames with flames’ (line 174). Like Laura, to achieve a place in this fiery communion, Rossetti emphasises the fact that the speaker of ‘From House to Home’ must demonstrate a willingness to become ‘new-lit’ (lines 181, 200) with love for Christ.

If not through *Interior Castle* itself, then through her connection with the Oxford Movement, Rossetti would have almost certainly been aware of the typological possibilities contained in 1 Kings 18:30-39. Indeed, in his sermon, *The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist*, Edward Pusey recalls St Ephraim’s conflation of the story of the burning of Elias’ sacrifice with the symbolism of the Eucharist. He claims that

S. Ephrem often speaks of our Lord’s Presence, under the image of “fire in the bread.”[...] In Thy Wine there dwelleth the Fire that cannot be drunk. Instead of that fire which devoured men, ye eat the fire in Bread and are *quicken*ed.” “In the Bread and the Cup are fire and the Holy Ghost.” “We have eaten Thee, we have drunken Thee, not that we shall make Thee fail, but that we might have life in Thee.” “Thy garment covered Thy feebler nature: the bread covereth the *fire which dwells therein*.” (emphasis mine)<sup>23</sup>

Throughout *Verses*, Rossetti arranges her poems so as to expand the fire and flame metaphor and exemplify the movement of being ‘quickened’ upon the mystical journey. In the fourth sonnet of the volume, “As the sparks fly upwards” (*CP*, p. 390-1), she appropriates the language of Job 5:7 (‘man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward’) in order to map out a vision of the union between God and each soul as they rejoice together ‘in the unutterable kiss’ (line 13). Comparing the ‘sparks’ which ‘fly upward’ (line 6) to the ‘saints who mount’ (line 9), she suggests that the Christian’s desire to mount to God is an inevitable part of her journey. Indeed, once enlivened by divine ‘wills’ and

---

<sup>23</sup> Edward B. Pusey, ‘The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist,’ A Sermon preached before the University in the Cathedral Church of Christ in Oxford (Oxford, 1853; repr. Kessinger Publishing co., 2004), p. 40.

blessed by spiritual 'desire' (lines 1-2), she argues that complete fulfilment depends on the believer's perseverance in ascending 'Onward and upward toward that blessed place' (line 11).

In my discussion of the ineffable characteristics of 'From House to Home,' I spoke of the allusions that are made to Isaiah and Revelation in the speaker's reference to the believers rising up to God as though flames of fire and in her declaration that 'No man could number them, no tongue disclose | Their secret sacred names' (lines 175-6). Building on this, I would like to suggest that when these lines are typologically read in the context of later poem, 'WHITSUNDAY' (*CP*, p. 441), a further allusion to Scripture can be gleaned. Indeed in Acts, Paul speaks of the 'cloven tongues of fire' that sat upon each of the individuals making up the multitude of believers who gathered at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). With this in mind, the use of the word 'tongue' in 'From House to Home' can be seen to be an implicit typological attempt to conflate the first Pentecost to the second coming where each believer will gather in communion with one another and worship God in Heaven.

In order for such a communion to become a reality, however, the speaker must extinguish any claims on her own individuality and find meaning and contentment in God alone. Hence, the proclamation that she will set her face 'as flint' (line 206) takes on a double meaning. As well as reflecting the stone-like determination of Isaiah's declaration: 'For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed' (Isaiah 50:7), this declaration also suggests a willingness to extinguish herself as she is set alight and enabled to lose her individuality as she joins the communion of 'flames with flames' (line 174).

Such a reading corresponds to the allusion made in *Time Flies* to St Agatha (February 5; p. 27) who sets ‘her face as a flint’ as she endures torture and persecution. It also reflects Rossetti’s poem, ‘An emerald is as green as grass.’ Included in her 1872 volume, *Sing Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book*, this poem speaks of the inherent worth of coal over the diamond in that it offers warmth in the freezing months of watching and waiting.

An emerald is as green as grass;  
A ruby red as blood;  
A sapphire shines as blue as heaven;  
A flint lies in the mud.

A diamond is a brilliant stone,  
To catch the world’s desire;  
An opal holds a fiery spark;  
But a flint holds fire. (*CP*, p. 251)

Much like the ‘pleasure place’ of ‘From House to Home’, the diamond is preferred by the worldly for its dazzling sparkle. However, as the speakers of both poems come to realise, the plain looking flint is actually a thing of more value. Indeed, it is only by setting her face ‘as flint’ (line 206) that the speaker of ‘From House to Home’ is able to endure the remainder of her earthly existence.

In ‘Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims,’ Rossetti includes two poems which depict the act of setting one’s face as a flint in communal terms. Whereas the speaker of ‘From House to Home’ states, ‘as flint I set my face’ (line 206), in her later poems Rossetti has her speakers assert their determination to reach the New Jerusalem not as individuals but as part of the Communion of Saints. Indeed, in “Whither the Tribes go up, even the Tribes of the Lord” (*CP*, p. 506), she encourages reading the phrase ‘Our face is set like flint against our trouble’ (line 9) alongside the declaration, ‘Our sails are set to the cross the tossing river, | Our face is set to reach Jerusalem’ (lines 13-14):

Light is our sorrow for it ends tomorrow,  
 Light is our death which cannot hold us fast;  
 So brief a sorrow can be scarcely sorrow,  
 Or death be death so quickly past.

One night, no more of pain that turns to pleasure,  
 One night, no more, of weeping weeping sore;  
 And then the heaped-up measure beyond measure,  
 In quietness evermore.

Our face is set like flint against our trouble,  
 Yet many things there are which comfort us;  
 This bubble is a rainbow-coloured bubble,  
 This bubble-life tumultuous.

Our sails are set to cross the tossing river,  
 Our face is set to reach Jerusalem;  
 We toil awhile, but then we rest for ever,  
 Sing with all Saints and rest with them.

I would like to suggest that the declaration, 'Light is our sorrow for it ends tomorrow' (line 1) should be interpreted in the framework of Augustine's argument that the higher souls strive to climb, the more they are 'inflamed' by God and the easier their ascent to heaven becomes. Indeed, as the speaker demonstrates her willingness to empty herself of selfish concerns and looks forwards to 'sing[ing] with all the Saints and rest[ing] with them' (line 16), her earthly burdens are lifted and she finds 'comfort' beyond the 'trouble' that 'This bubble-life tumultuous' offers (lines 10, 9, 12). By taking the title of the poem directly from Psalm 122:4, Rossetti offers an additional dimension to the notions of singing 'with all Saints' and looking for meaning beyond the superficial splendours of the world. As I have indicated, the practice of psalmody constitutes a central element of the Tractarian devotional service and was understood to serve as a direct anticipation of integration into the Community of Saints. By repeatedly using the words 'our' and 'we' throughout the poem in spite of the fact that the psalm, attributed to David, uses the pronoun 'I,' Rossetti both

reflects notions of liturgical chanting and linguistically suggests the ramifications of typological fulfilment. The consistent repetition of both phrases and words that Rossetti utilises throughout the poem is characteristic of the Psalms of ascent, of which Psalm 122 is the third. Like the psalms, the poem uses repetition to express the 'toil' (line 15) of pilgrimage and to establish a musicality which sustains and lightens their journey. Following David's joy at the promised 'peace' and 'tranquillity' of Jerusalem (verse 7), Rossetti's speaker looks forward to rejoicing in 'quietness for evermore' (line 8). It is this use of the word 'evermore,' alongside the expression of expectation that Jerusalem is a place wherein she will 'rest for ever' (line 15), that characterises the poem's typological dimension and works to further establish the chasm that the speaker of 'From House to Home' claims exists between 'the outer barren ground' and the 'inner ground that budded flowers' (lines 125, 126).

Later in her 'Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims' sequence, Rossetti offers another typological counterpart to the psalms of ascent. Articulating their emphatic movement, the speaker of "Thy Servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (*CP*, p. 537-8) encourages King 'David' (line 12) to 'chant,' 'Stir up,' 'Exult,' and 'Peal out' God's praises' (lines 4,5,6,7). In recognition of the fact that 'Devil and Death and hades' are 'Not quickly broken' (lines 9-10), she reminds him that, in God, he has the power to respond to the 'roar' of 'black Satan' (line 7) and 'Front' the evil he encounters 'with a face of tenfold flint' (line 11). In spite of its address to David, the call to 'chant God's praise along the narrow way' (line 4) roots the poem firmly in a New Testament schema since it alludes to Jesus' declaration that 'strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it' (Matthew 7:14). In addition, by



asking David to demonstrate a willingness to 'Die for thy Lord, as once for thee thy Lord' (line 14), the speaker alludes to the response that, Rossetti suggests, Christ's sacrifice should elicit from each believer. Thus, the command to 'Front' obstacles with a 'face of tenfold flint' (line 11) is transformed from a battle cry reflective of David's declaration to Goliath, 'Thy Servant will go and fight with this Philistine' (1 Samuel 17:32), into a declaration of vulnerability in the face of God willing him to enkindle the flint of the self and incorporate the flame it produces in the conflagration of Heaven.

Understood in terms of "Thy Servant will go and fight with this Philistine," the arduous journey that the speaker of 'From House to Home' experiences can be seen as a reflection of the 'narrow way' that the soldiers of Christ are called to walk. Travelling the painful journey from the 'house' of individuality and delight to her true spiritual 'home' with God and the communion of believers, she looks back on her original dwelling place, or 'pleasurance' where 'leaping lambs safe from the unfeared knife' and 'singing-birds rejoicing' in the trees (lines 22-23). Such a warm environment, described by Linda Marshall as 'a Blakean body of sweet delight if there ever was one,'<sup>24</sup> could easily be mistaken for the 'garden, goal, and nest' which constitutes the paradise described in Rossetti's earlier poem, 'Christian and Jew. A dialogue.' (CP, p. 66-68, line 23) However, the familiarity and repose that the speaker feels with these surroundings is shattered at the moment her angel-like companion deserts her. Following my earlier suggestion that her relationship with him typologically anticipates her later communication with God, the fact that his

---

<sup>24</sup> Linda E. Marshall, 'Mysteries Beyond Angels in Christina Rossetti's from House to Home' in *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke; New York: Macmillan; St. Martin's, 1999), pp.313-24 (p. 316).

departure left her ill at ease with her surroundings and her fellow creatures indicates that her happiness depended on having him, along with the natural world, as an *echo* establishing her own personhood. Rather than existing externally to herself, the fact of his protean presence ('sometimes like a snowdrift he was fair, | And sometimes like a sunset glorious red', lines 49-50) along with the fact that their communication was based on 'echoes' and 'recalls' suggests that through him, an integral aspect of her personality became externalised.

In addition to enhancing the sense of affliction that Teresa claims is to be expected after experiencing a locution, the recognition that her relationship with the 'one like an angel' (line 45) was an incomplete anticipation of future fulfilment fosters the speaker's sense of hankering, longing and straining after eternity. Throughout *Verses*, Rossetti suggests that these effects are the result of a deferral of spiritual fulfilment in a world of isolation and solipsism where identity *is* understood in terms of who an individual is and what she does. In a poem in *Verses*, "Lord, save us, we perish" (*CP*, p. 469), she prays that God might save

Lest the god of this world blind us  
Lest he speak us fair.  
Lest he forge a chain to bind us,  
Lest he bait a snare. (lines 5-8)

Throughout her work, Rossetti suggests that the Romantic concept of coming to self-knowledge through an awareness of one's environment is fraught with difficulties. Rather, she repeatedly emphasises that a true sense of identity comes only through communication with God, fellowship with the saints, and a deliberate avoidance of worldly trappings.

According to Teresa, souls without prayer grow up accustomed to 'living all the time with the reptiles and other creatures to be found in the outer court of the castle that they have almost become like them' (*Interior*, p. 7). In the first mansions of the Interior Castle, she claims that it is difficult for the inhabitants to enjoy any light since the animals which abide there force them to close their eyes to everything but themselves. In the higher mansions, she argues that although there are fewer opportunities for the 'poisonous' creatures of the outside world to enter,

A few little lizards, being very agile, can hide themselves all over the place; and, although they do no harm- especially [...] if we take no notice of them- they correspond to the little thoughts that proceed from the imagination and from what has been said it will be seen that they are often very troublesome. Agile though they are, however, the lizards cannot enter this Mansion, for neither imagination nor memory nor understanding can be an obstacle to the blessings that are bestowed in it. And I shall venture to affirm that, if this is indeed union with God, the devil cannot enter or do any harm; for His Majesty is in such close contact and union with the essence of the soul that he will not dare to approach, nor can he even understand this secret thing. (*Interior*, p. 84)

Teresa's suggestion that the lizards can do 'no harm' if 'we take no notice of them' likens them to demons. 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you' James declares (James 4:7). By resisting the temptation to dwell on the lizards that surround the soul, Teresa asserts that no harm can come to the soul. In 'From House to Home', the speaker's 'heath' lay 'where lizards lived | In strange metallic mail.' They exist, she claims, 'Like darted lightning's here and there perceived | But no where dwelt upon' (lines 29-32). Whilst Elizabeth Stanhope argues that the creatures are cartoon-like representations of individual members of the Pre- Raphaelite Brotherhood, I want to suggest that a consideration of them in the context of Rossetti's other work and in the light of the creatures

(toads, caterpillars and snails) of *Interior Castle* attributes to the poem additional eschatological significance.<sup>25</sup>

When she composed 'Goblin Market' in 1859, Rossetti entitled it 'A Peep at the Goblins.'<sup>26</sup> Highlighting the implications of this initial title, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra suggests that

While at first blush the word "peep" may evoke the innocent playfulness of her cousin Eliza Bray's *A Peep at the Pixies*, in the context of the narrative itself "peep" becomes overlaid with the connotations of furtive looking, stolen glances at the forbidden, clandestine curiosity.<sup>27</sup>

In the narrative itself, Rossetti indicates her engagement with these connotations when she writes, 'Lizzie covered up her eyes, | Covered close lest they should look' (lines 50-51) before linking Laura's downfall to the initial act of gazing at the animalistic goblin men and their fruits. The idea that Lizzie is able to mirror Christ as she stands 'Like a lily in a flood' (line 409) and resists the onslaughts of the 'Cat-like and rat-like | Ratel- and wombat-like' (lines 340-1) goblin men suggests that it was not the actual *revelation* of their presence that made Laura feel 'deaf and blind' (line 259) and drove her to 'death's door' (line 321), but it was her vulnerability and her unwillingness to, in the words of Teresa, 'take no notice of them.'

In his article, "'Twilight is not good for maidens': Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in *Goblin Market*,' David F. Morrill speaks of

---

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Stanhope, 'Compromise rejected : a reading of Christina Rossetti's poetry which shows it to be born out of a continuing struggle to express and resolve contradiction' (unpublished M.Phil, University of Warwick, 1999), p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> In a note dated 7 December 1893, she writes, 'In the first instance I named it "A Peep at the Goblins" in imitation of my cousin Mrs Bray's "A Peep at the Pixies," but my brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti substituted the greatly improved title as it now stands,' quoted in *CP*, p. 884.

<sup>27</sup> Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 'Visualising the Fantastic Subject: *Goblin Market* and the Gaze,' in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, ed. by Mary Arseneau, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, and Antony Harrison pp. 137-169 (p. 140).

the ‘horrifying implication’ of the ‘energy exchange’ that Rossetti alludes to when she speaks of the withered flowers over Jeanie’s grave. He writes that Rossetti leads the reader to expect ‘that Jeanie is somehow “alive”- that her survival beneath the earth leads to a complete enervation of nature itself in her search for juice-blood-semen.’<sup>28</sup> However unconventional his argument may appear, the suggestion of Jeanie’s vampirism corresponds directly with the notion Rossetti expresses in ‘Babylon the Great’ (*CP*, p. 470), that the careless gazer will become ‘as she’ (line 10), the foul creature of Revelation 17. Furthermore, Morrill’s interpretation sees Rossetti’s interpretation of the dynamics of vampirism as a direct inversion of the dynamics of trinitarian personhood whereby, through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, the individual comes to understand herself through contemplating God as she becomes more and more Christ-like.

The horror of insubstantial masks, along with the anguish of being forced into living an artificial life of an ‘automaton,’ is a central theme of Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*.<sup>29</sup> According to Mackenzie Bell, William Michael Rossetti remarked that ‘When Gabriel, Christina, and I were young we used to read Maturin’s novels over and over again, and they took great hold of our imaginations.’<sup>30</sup> In spite of this, apart from Diane D’Amico’s article, ‘Christina Rossetti: The Maturin Poems,’ Rossetti scholarship has largely resisted

---

<sup>28</sup> David F. Morrill, “‘Twilight is not good for maidens’: Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in *Goblin Market*,” *Victorian Poetry*, 28 (1990), 1-16 (p. 9).

<sup>29</sup> Charles R. Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer: A Tale* [1820] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p. 153.

<sup>30</sup> Mackenzie Bell, *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (1898), 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (New York: Haskell House Pub. Ltd, 1971), p. 16.

investigating the influence of the Gothic upon her work.<sup>31</sup> For instance, little has been done to ascertain the correspondences between Rossetti's poetry and the writings of Ann Radcliffe which Rossetti read in 1883 when she was preparing to write a biography of her life (*Letters*, iii, p. 112-5, April 1883). Although this investigation is beyond the scope of this project, I would like to highlight the aspects of Rossetti's Gothic inherence that had a direct impact upon her biblical exegesis.

Rossetti's letters nowhere mention her uncle, John Polidori. However, as the son of her Grandfather who arranged for a private printing of her first volumes of poetry and the brother of her beloved mother, it is highly unlikely she would have been unaware of his writings which included the 1919 novella, *The Vampyre*. According to Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick, it not only provided the 'first sustained fictional treatment of vampirism in English,' but it also 'completely recast the mythology upon which it drew.'<sup>32</sup> Suffering from depression, Polidori died in mysterious circumstances in 1821. It is likely that this, along with the fact that he had served as the physician of the notorious celebrity, Byron, caused his family shame and accounts for Rossetti's silence regarding his work. In *The Vampyre*, one of the ways in which Polidori 'recast the mythology upon which [he] drew' was by presenting his vampire as a high society aristocratic man, rather than a stereotypical monster. Throughout her poetry, Rossetti repeatedly highlights the alluring masks of evil that coerce humans to open themselves up to demonic influences. Following the biblical precedent of Satan taking the form of the serpent (Genesis 3), she uses small

---

<sup>31</sup> Diane D'Amico 'Christina Rossetti: The Maturin Poems', *Victorian Poetry*, 19 (1981), 117-131.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick, 'Introduction,' in *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. vii-xxii (p. x).

creatures as signifiers of the corrosive evil that, if they are not resisted, can initiate destruction. For instance, in her roundel about the 'self-slain soul' ('Toll, bell, Toll', *CP*, p. 473), she associates the mole with an ungodly lack of direction. She writes, 'Gropes in its own grave the mole | Wedding darkness, undescrying, | Tending to no different goal' (lines 5-7). Like the mole in 'From House to Home' who is described as groping 'on from year to year' (line 42), this mole is associated with the corrupted, unhopeful, and lost soul who has not resisted the devil's schemes.

In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti speaks of her 'own citadel' that can only be undermined by her own self. 'My own inherent evil is what I have to cope with' (*FD*, p. 490) she writes. Like small creatures that appear unexpectedly in interior construction, the obstacles to self-realisation often come in the form of small but poisonous thoughts or unhelpful attitudes that emerge when the self remains unchecked by prayerful communion with God. As the acknowledgment of the lizards in the *Interior Castle* prevents the development of the soul, so too do the lizards in 'From House to Home' prevent the speaker from fully experiencing God's presence. It is only when she has 'no living breathing thing' (line 81) to distract her that the speaker is able to empty herself from her self-regarding habits and open herself up to divine communication. Teresa beseeches her readers not to be negligent as they allow for this process to transform them.

For this communication has been no more than [...] one single short meeting, and the devil will take great pains about combating it and will try to hinder the betrothal. Afterwards, when he sees that the soul is completely surrendered to the spouse, he dare not do this, for he is afraid of such a soul as that, and he knows by experience that if he attempts anything of the kind he will come out very much the loser and the soul will achieve a corresponding gain (*Interior*, p. 109).

### iii. Transiency and Passivity

James claims that transiency and passivity, the final two characteristics through which mystical states can be identified, 'are less sharply marked' than ineffable and noetic qualities 'but are usually found' and, considering St. Teresa's assertion that God can communicate with the individual soul in 'one single short meeting' (see above), he speaks of the significance of the transient experience in endowing the believer with a deep feeling of 'inner richness and importance' (James, p. 381). Recognising how this 'inner richness' is depicted in St Teresa's depiction of the fifth mansion of *Interior Castle*, he cites her observation that

"In the orison of union [...] the soul is fully awake as regards God, but wholly asleep as regards things of this world and in respect of herself. During the short time the union lasts, she is as it were deprived of every feeling, and even if she would, she could not think of any single thing. Thus she needs to employ no artifice in order to arrest the use of her understanding: it remains so stricken with inactivity that she neither knows what she loves, nor in what a manner she loves, nor what she wills. In short, she is utterly dead to the things of the world and lives solely in God."<sup>33</sup>

In 'From House to Home,' Rossetti aligns the transiency and passivity involved in the 'orison of union' when she has her speaker compare her mystical experience to a 'numbing swoon' (line 2). Like the pilgrim in *Interior Castle*, who remains 'stricken with inactivity' whilst she experiences 'union' with God, Rossetti's speaker is able to hear the 'song | Of spheres and spirits' *only* once the life has 'swooned' from her (lines 105-6). In her analysis of the nature of mysticism, Evelyn Underhill defines the 'orison of union' as 'a brief foretaste of the Unitive

---

<sup>33</sup> St Teresa, *Interior Castle*, Fifth Abode, ch. i., in *Œuvres*, trans. by BOUIX, iii. 421-424, quoted in James, p. 408-9.



state, often enjoyed for short periods in the Illuminative Way.<sup>34</sup> In 'From House to Home', by using terms such as 'swooned' and 'entranced' (lines 106, 113) to describe the physical effects of the mystical experience, Rossetti very deliberately blurs the boundaries between life and death in order to demonstrate that her speaker's 'orison of union' exists as a 'foretaste' of 'the blessed noon' of God's kingdom (line 197).

In the octave of her later devotional sonnet, 'Lord, make me one with Thine own faithful ones' (*CP*, p. 395-6), Rossetti reinforces and clarifies the correspondence between the orison and the 'Unitive state' when she prays that each believer may be 'At one' with the saints 'in alms and orisons' (line 4):

Lord, make me one with Thine own faithful ones,  
Thy Saints who love Thee and are loved by Thee;  
Till the day break and till the shadows flee,  
At one with them in alms and orisons:  
At one with him who toils and him who runs,  
And him who yearns for union yet to be;  
At one with all who throng the crystal sea  
And wait the setting of our moons and suns. (lines 1-8)

In 'From House to Home,' she describes 'multitudes' of worshipping saints as a conflagration, rising as though 'flames with flames' (lines 165, 174). Whilst her speaker suggests that she must wait for the coming of the 'blessed noon' in order that she join this conflagration and fully participate in the 'new song' of the saints (lines 197, 169); the speaker of 'Lord, make me one with Thine own faithful ones' recognises that she can join the Communion of Saints by means of 'alms and orisons' (line 4) *whilst* she waits for the 'setting of our moons and suns' (line 8). Preceding the inclusion of the sonnet in *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti suggests that 'whilst no man may deliver his brother, there is dignity,

---

<sup>34</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism; a study in the nature and development of man's spiritual consciousness* (New York: Dutton. 1961), p. 245.

joy, comfort, a present blessing and a future beatitude in the Communion of Saints' (*FD*, p. 47). It is the recognition of this 'present blessing' that, I want to suggest, characterises much of Rossetti's later poetry and signals her increasing concern with investigating the nature of the Communion of Saints. Whilst the sequence of devotional poetry that she includes at the end of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* concentrates almost exclusively on future blessings, in *Verses* her concern is with how 'Thy will be done in earth as heaven *today*' (emphasis mine, 'Alone Lord God,' *CP*, p. 389, line 12). In 'Lord, make me one with Thine own faithful ones,' she suggests that the obstacles which prevent an individual from becoming 'At one' (lines 4,5,6) with this 'future beatitude' are overcome by a determination to imitate 'him who toils and him who runs' (line 5). Highlighting the perseverance the saints demonstrate 'Till the day break and till the shadows flee' (line 3), she typologically incorporates the woman of 'From House to Home,' whose 'strength | Was strung up until daybreak of delight' (lines 133-4), into the wider communion of God's 'own faithful ones.'

Rossetti's repeated references to the noon and the daybreak of the heavenly kingdom draw out the typological implications of the Old Testament narrative of Jacob's experience of wrestling with God 'until the breaking of the day' (Genesis 32:24). In 'Lord, make me one with Thine own faithful ones,' by positioning an allusion to this experience alongside references to the 'crystal sea' and the 'setting of our moons and suns' (lines 3,7,8) that characterise the New Jerusalem which is described in the book of Revelation (Revelation 4:6, 21:23), she highlights the unity of the Biblical schema and figures the spatial movement from the anticipatory state of 'yearn[ing]' (line 6) to the place where the saints can rest as they 'wait' (line 8) for the coming of God's kingdom. That the

experience of wrestling with God endows the believer with, what James terms, 'inner richness and importance' is demonstrated in the sestet of the sonnet.

Ah, my beloved ones gone on before,  
Who looked not back with hand upon the plough!  
If beautiful to me while still in sight,  
How must be your aspects now;  
Your unknown, well-known aspects in that light  
Which clouds shall never cloud for evermore. (lines 9-14)

Understood within the typological framework that is suggested by the implicit allusion to Jacob, the reference to 'my beloved ones gone on before' (line 9) denotes not only the loved ones for whom the speaker grieves, but also her Old Testament precedents. Indeed, by speaking of the Communion of Saints as those 'Who looked not back with hand upon the plough' (line 10), Rossetti continues to root her poetic contemplation firmly within the bounds of Scripture. Recalling Jesus' proclamation that 'No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God' (Luke 9:62), she highlights the unity of both Testaments and proclaims their relevance for the contemporary believer. Added to this, her claim that the 'aspects' of those who have died and been transformed in and through Christ are both 'unknown' and 'well-known' (lines 12-13) hints at the chasm which exists between worldly and heavenly knowledge. Considered in terms of the destruction of the 'pleasure-place' (line 6) in 'From House to Home,' which turned the speaker's 'summer back to snow' and meant that 'Azure and sun were starved from heaven above' (lines 78, 85), the sonnet can be read to exemplify the notion that, whilst remaining in the world, a true understanding of transformed spiritual identity is blocked by 'clouds' (line 14) that occasionally part but never disappear completely.

In her introduction to Walter Hilton's mystical treatise, *The Scale of Perfection*, Underhill suggests that 'The object of the spiritual life is the

restoration of the soul to its proper status, by a re-making or reformation which shall obliterate the false or dark image and restore the reality.’<sup>35</sup> It is the realisation of this ‘re-making or reformation’ that, I would like to suggest, characterises much of Rossetti’s devotional poetry. In ‘Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims,’ Rossetti continues to use the metaphor of mists and clouds to represent the permeable veil that divides the ‘false or dark image’ from the ‘reality’ of God. Developing her investigation of the mystical experience undertaken by the speaker in ‘From House to Home,’ who is given divine strength to experience the locutionary vision of the ‘waxing radiance’ of eternity (line 115), she suggests that only through fervent praying and gazing will the saints be able to work with God to ‘shift the haze’ that separates them from their ‘Homeward’ path (“The end is not yet,” *CP*, p. 517, lines 9, 7, 2). Following this, in ‘A Castle-Builders World’ (*CP*, p. 522), she suggests that a result of living in ‘the misty gusty place’ (line 2) of the world is that individuals become ‘Shades of bodies without souls’ (line 10) rather than one with the Communion of Saints.

Anticipating the eventual conflation of the individual believer with ‘Thy Saints’ who are characterised by the fact that they ‘love Thee and are loved by Thee’ (‘Lord, make me one with Thine own faithful ones, line 2); in an earlier exposition of Genesis 32, Rossetti acknowledges that a true understanding of personhood is to be sought through a consideration of the godly characters of the Bible. She prays, ‘O Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom Jacob prevailed, help us with that holy patriarch by prayer to hold Thee fast, and by love to *cleave* steadfastly unto Thee, our ever-present Aid’ (emphasis mine, *AD*, prayer no. 6). *The Oxford English Dictionary* contains various definitions of the word ‘cleave.’ In addition

---

<sup>35</sup> Evelyn Underhill, ‘Introduction,’ in Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. from ms. sources (London: John M. Watkins, 1923), pp. v-liv (p.xxxii).

to denoting the process whereby something will ‘stick fast or adhere, as by a glutinous surface,’ the word also means ‘To part or divide by a cutting blow; to hew asunder; to split.’<sup>36</sup> It is the simultaneous action of adhering to Christ and allowing ‘the word of God,’ which is ‘sharper than any two-edged sword,’ to pierce ‘even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit’ (Hebrews 4:12) that, I would like to suggest, characterises Rossetti’s understanding of the ‘orison of union’ which St. Teresa describes. In her explication of the ‘two-edged sword’ which is depicted in both Hebrews and Revelation 2:12, Rossetti suggests,

We may perhaps lawfully think of the two edges as under one of their aspects. One cuts asunder the evil servant penally, irremediably, by decree of the Supreme and Just Judge. The other, by tenderness of the Good Physician, wounds us for our own benefit and that afterwards He may heal us. (*FD*, p. 67)

In ‘From House to Home’, the speaker recognises that, in order that her soul can eventually ‘walk in white’ (line 203), she must ‘today [...] fade as doth a leaf’ and ‘languish and grow less’ (lines 219-20). Exemplifying the lesson that ‘The wounds are faithful as a friend’ and will cause the ‘The wilderness [to] [...] blossom as a rose’” (lines 157-8), her experience of fading and languishing encompasses both definitions of the word ‘cleave’ and pertains to, what Rossetti understands as, the second edge of the ‘two-edged sword.’

Introducing her sequence of devotional poetry in *A Pageant and Other Poems*, Rossetti’s tri-part sonnet sequence, “If Thou Sayest, Behold we Knew it Not” (*CP*, p. 329- 330), articulates a recognition that the process of attaining union with God can only be sustained by divine grace. Its speaker prays, ‘Seek us and find us, for we cannot Thee | Or seek or find or hold or cleave’ (sonnet 2, lines 5-6). Following this, she likens to Christ the ‘Disfigured faces’ and the

---

<sup>36</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> July 2008]

‘worn-out knees that kneel’ (sonnet 3, line 7) of the preserving believers who forego their selfish concerns and allow themselves to be divided asunder. The sestet of the final sonnet depicts Christ’s act of self-emptying on the cross:

Lord, by Thy Passion,— when Thy Face was marred.  
In sight of earth and hell tumultuous,  
And Thy heart failed in Thee like melting wax,  
And thy Blood dropped more precious than the nard,—  
Lord, for Thy sake, not our’s, supply our lacks,  
For Thine own sake, not our’s, Christ, pity us. (lines 9-14)

In chapter two, I used Brennan’s theory of olfactory transmission as a framework through which to interpret the spiritual transformation of the individual believer as she enters into communion with God. By comparing Christ’s blood to ‘nard’ (line 12), Rossetti hints at the imbibing relationship that occurs when the individual demonstrates a willingness to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Her choice of phrase also alludes to the ‘costly oil of spikenard’ with which Mary Magdalene anointed the feet of Jesus before wiping them with her hair. Filling the house with ‘the fragrance of the oil,’ John 12:3 suggests that, like the smell of the oil, the effect of Mary’s act of generosity towards Jesus was powerful and far-reaching.

In ‘Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims,’ Rossetti exemplifies the typological correspondence that exists between Christ’s blood and the ‘spikenard’ when she offers her own poetic interpretation of God’s comfort as expressed in Luke 12:27.

Solomon most glorious in array  
Put not on his glories without care:—  
Clothe us as Thy lilies of a day,  
As the lilies Thou accountest fair,  
Lilies of Thy making,  
Of Thy love partaking,  
Filling with free fragrance earth and air:  
Thou Who gatherest lilies, gather us and wear.

(“Consider the Lilies of the field,” *CP*, p. 533)

Understood in the typological context which Rossetti implicitly constructs, the notion that God fills the earth ‘with free fragrance’ (line 7) highlights the universal implications of the crucifixion. Reflecting upon the last part of Revelation 21:6, ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely,’ Rossetti writes ‘Free is the gift, but I also am free to accept or to decline it’ (*FD*, p. 489). In turn, this reading suggests further typological implications, the most significant existing when the poem is interpreted within Revelation’s prophecy that each believer will eventually be clothed with robes which have been made ‘white in the blood of the Lamb’ (Revelation 7:14).

In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti develops her earlier allusions to Jacob and to the process of being filled with the ‘fragrance’ of Christ’s blood and outlines her mature understanding of trinitarian personhood when she writes,

Hands emptied by showing mercy to the poor, are set free to hold fast what God will require of us; hearts emptied of self are prepared to receive and retrain all He will demand [...] Thus, Jacob said: “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me [...] And He blessed him there.” Yet because God Himself is to us more than all His blessings, let us rather protest with the Bride: “I found Him Whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let Him go.” (*FD*, p. 96)

The conflation of Jacob’s protestation with the words of the Song of Songs’s bride (Song of Songs 3:4) is typical of Rossetti’s typological practice whereby passages which may at first seem incongruous are brought together. In addition to crossing gender boundaries, this conflation exemplifies Rossetti’s understanding of the ‘orison’ which grants the believer a foretaste of Heaven and re-conceptualises eschatological boundaries.

In chapter one, I offered a typological interpretation of “And there was no more Sea” and noted how the word ‘Orisons’ (line 17) functions as a verb which conveys the relational basis upon which God and man are to be understood. Exploring the dynamics of mystical states, James suggests that this basis is founded in recognition of the soul’s passivity as opposed to God’s activity (James, p. 381-2). I would like to conclude this chapter by suggesting that it is through poetically depicting this basis as the process whereby the individual empties her heart ‘of self’ in preparation for God to fill it that Rossetti is able to engage with the mysticism of the Patristic Fathers and highlight her own understanding of true personhood.



## Chapter 4: Moving beyond Eden: The Typology of the Christian Journey

Eden, the garden of God, was exceeding fair: it stones were precious, its gold was good; its Topaz gems and other delights glowed without blemish; all within its circuit was very good. Yet this was merely the paradise wherein man sinned, and whence he was driven out. Jerusalem, which shall on God's own day come down from Heaven, that New Jerusalem which is Christ's bride, and His city, and His temple, is also His garden: there flows a pure river of Water of Life, pure as crystal; there blooms the Tree of Life, whose fruits are twelve, yielded in twelve harvest months, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Into this garden entereth nothing that defileth: and whoso entereth goeth out no more.

Between the two paradises are planted two other gardens, the Garden of Agony, and the Garden of Sepulchre: through these lies a way of sorrows, along which we must needs run our course whether we follow Christ faithfully, or whether with the unfaithful and doomed king we flee to death by the way of the garden house.

Thanks be to God for all His saints whom He maketh trees of His garden, citizens of His city, pillars in His temple; and they shall go out no more: thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift, through Jesus Christ our Lord. (CS, p. 374-5)

Exploring her depictions of the Christian journey through the 'the Garden of Agony, and the Garden of Sepulchre,' this chapter offers an analysis of the spatial metaphors intrinsic to Rossetti's biblical typology and investigates her concern with integrating the individual 'course' that, she believes, 'we must needs run' into the wider, biblically derived, framework of the Communion of Saints. In her analysis of 'Church Architecture, Tractarian Poetry, and the Forms of Faith,' Kirstie Blair suggests that, in John Keble's poem 'Trinity Sunday,' movement through time is 'elided with movement through space, as the progress of the Christian year becomes metaphorically linked to the progress of a worshipper in a church towards the shrine.'<sup>1</sup> Considering how Rossetti elides the dynamics of time and space as she traces the temporal and spatial journeys of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Kirstie Blair, 'Church Architecture, Tractarian Poetry and the Forms of Faith,' in *Shaping Belief: Culture, Politics and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, ed. by Victoria Morgan and Clare Williams (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 129-145 (p. 133).

saints in *Verses*, I highlight the particular nuances she gives the Tractarian formation of trinitarian personhood with which Keble was working. Focusing particularly on those nuances that arise from her engagement with biblically based liturgical practices, I demonstrate the various ways through which Rossetti highlights Paul's teaching that all who believe in Christ are 'called to be saints' (Romans 1:7) and participates in the establishment of the 'chain of living links' ('From House to Home,' line 158) which, she suggests, binds the saints together in Christ.

**i. 'Speed me with a song': The impetus of liturgy**

In her consideration of the transcendentalist impetus behind the re-introduction of sacrificial worship into the English Church, Evelyn Underhill suggests that

The character of the Anglican revival, as fundamentally a re-awakening of worship, a renewed response to the Holy, is fully realized when we come to the second phase of the movement, with its intense concentration on the details of corporate devotion. This impassioned ritualism is easily discredited [...] But it was in fact the outward expression of a deeply founded life of worship and self-oblation; which could not be content with less than perfection in all that belonged to the service of God.<sup>2</sup>

As I will demonstrate, Rossetti's increasing concern to depict the 'self-oblation' that is involved in the practice of communal worship should be understood in the context of this 'impassioned ritualism.' Indeed, whilst the Oxford Movement entered the 'second phase' of its development in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, with its leaders repeatedly articulating their 'renewed response to the Holy,' Rossetti was simultaneously revising and renewing her earlier writings so as to express an increased engagement with ancient and medieval doctrine and

---

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (James Nisbet and Company, 1936; repr. Guildford: Eagle, 1991), p. 253-4.

Tractarian theological discourse. In *The Face of the Deep*, she articulates her ‘renewed’ attitude to the practice of liturgy when she claims

Heavenly worship is fullness of joy and pleasures for ever-more.  
Earthly worship is too often a constraint and weariness.

Amongst the causes of this depressing difference certain appear to be removable, others not so. Some of the heavenly conditions of worship abide beyond our attainment, some are imitable. Presumably to assimilate the two systems of worship so far as feasible, might be a step secured towards informing the ritual of earth with the significance and sentiment of Heaven. (p. 180)

Following this, in her commentary on Revelation 5:8, she suggests that ritualistic practices of worship are ‘easily discredited’ and laments that unlike ‘The Living Creatures’ who have harps and worship the Lord ‘in the beauty of holiness [...] We, remote from such glories too often, neither do our best, nor bring our best’ (*FD*, p. 180).

In 1882, by adding her sonnet ‘Resurgam’ (*CP*, p. 379) to a selection of poems she was to include in subsequent editions of *A Pageant and Other Poems*, Rossetti poetically exemplifies the process of ‘informing the ritual of earth with the significance and sentiment of Heaven’ and of bringing ‘our best’ to God. By using the metaphor of climbing to articulate the process whereby believers strive to reach the place from which they can proclaim ‘Resurgam,’ or ‘I will arise,’ with confidence, she elides the spatial and the temporal dynamics that underpin spiritual growth and emphasises the struggle involved in becoming ‘Emptied and stripped of all save only Grace’ (line 7).

From depth to height, from height to loftier height,  
The climber sets his foot and sets his face,  
Tracks lingering sunbeams to their halting-place,  
And counts the last pulsations of the light.  
Strenuous thro’ day and unsurprised by night  
He runs a race with Time and wins the race,  
Emptied and stripped of all save only Grace,  
Will, Love, a threefold panoply of might.  
Darkness descends for light he toiled to seek:

He stumbles on the darkened mountain-head,  
 Left breathless in the unbreathable thin air,  
 Made freeman of the living and the dead:—  
 He wots not he has topped the topmost peak,  
 But the returning sun will find him there.

In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti speaks of climbing ‘celestial mountains’ and notes that ‘to walk in Christ’s incomparable footsteps is both easy and difficult.’ She suggests that ‘The easiness lies in our surroundings, the difficulty in ourselves’ (*FD*, p. 35, 34). This argument corresponds to the dynamic that St. Augustine investigates in his *Confessions* when he argues that the climb of the believer becomes easier as he ascends higher and his weight becomes less earthly and more like fire.<sup>3</sup> It also reflects the Dantean figuration of saints whose ‘motion’ Maria Rossetti describes as ‘rapid in proportion to the vividness wherewith they apprehend’ the Beatific Vision.’<sup>4</sup> In ‘Resurgam,’ anticipating her later theological engagement with Augustinian and Dantean metaphors of spiritual movement, Rossetti suggests that it is as a result of his humanity that the climber ‘*stumbles* on the darkened mountain-head’ and is ‘Left *breathless* in the unbreathable thin air’ (emphasis mine, lines 10-11). In *Letter and Spirit*, which she published the following year, she contends that if the self-forgetful believer rejoices

it is on spiritual heights, with Blessed Mary magnifying the Lord; if she laments, it is still on spiritual mountain-tops, making with Jephthah’s daughter a pure oblation of unflinching self-sacrifice. The air she breathes is too rare and keen for grosser persons; they mark the clouds which involve her feet, but discern not those early and late sunbeams which turn her mists to rainbows and kindle her veiled head to a golden glory. (*LS*, p. 92)

---

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine Revised from a Former Translation*, trans. by Edward Pusey (Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1843), book xiii, part 9, section 10, p. 282.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Francesca Rossetti, *The Shadow of Dante* (London: Rivingtons, 1871), p. 202.

In 'Resurgam,' with his 'grosser' constitution to be overcome, the climber's recognition of the 'returning sun' (line 14), or of the immanent return of God's own *Son*, is hampered. Nonetheless, Rossetti suggests that his willingness to run the 'race with Time' and to empty himself of all earthly comforts (lines 6-7), means that he is given the power to 'discern' the 'sunbeams' of grace (*LS*, see above) and to reach the 'topmost peak' (line 13) of Heaven.

By opening the sonnet with a description of the climber preparing to ascend 'From depth to height, from height to loftier height' (line 1), Rossetti suggests that the path to the 'topmost peak' is reached gradually. She contends that just as God brought King David up 'from the *depths* of the earth' (emphasis mine, Psalm 71:20), so too will he enable each individual pilgrim to rise. Whereas the 'loftier height' that the speaker envisions corresponds to the 'height of His sanctuary' that David foresees (Psalm 102:19), and the 'depth' corresponds to the earth, I want to suggest that the mid-way 'height' alludes to the in-between place of the believer (line 1). Spatially mapping the period of 'probation' (*FD*, p. 278) and anticipating her later reference to passing through the 'Garden of Agony, and the Garden of Sepulchre' which exists 'Between the two paradises;' Rossetti explores the notion that the slope of the mountain is where believers are 'Emptied and stripped of all' that pertains to worldly passions (line 7).

Rossetti indicates that the pilgrimage to Heaven is complex and winding rather than easy and straight by the rhythm and the rhyme scheme of the verse. In his investigation of the figurative properties of the spiral staircase and the traditional ziggurat, Northrop Frye contends that 'The immense suggestiveness of the spiral climb up the mountain, may be connected with the fact that each

revolution on the spiral is circumferential; that is, one acquires a complete vision or understanding of what one is doing at each stage.’<sup>5</sup> In ‘Resurgam,’ by structurally and linguistically incorporating her earlier depiction of the ‘road wind[ing] up-hill all the way’ to the final resting place (‘Up-hill,’ *CP*, p. 59-60, line 1), Rossetti exemplifies the circularity and momentum of the climb whereby the pilgrim establishes his place in the eternal schema when he ‘counts the last pulsation of the light’ at each stage (line 4). In the octave, by drawing her rhyme scheme together into an enclosed chiasmic structure, she creates a spiral movement which highlights the notion of reaching security in God. However, in the final tercet, by using the rhyme scheme bac instead of cba to mirror the previous tercet’s abc, she represents a break away from the familiar and expected and structurally echoes the disjunction that exists in the space and time of waiting where the believer is able only to contemplate finally reaching the *newness* of life that only the ‘returning sun’ (line 14) can bring.

In *Called to be Saints*, by suggesting that a study of St Bartholomew’s life can entice the believer to forgo her individual concerns and ‘press forward towards that land where the knowledge that is in part shall be done away because that which is perfect is come’ (*CS*, p. 363), Rossetti highlights the importance of living out the promise of the newness of life by maintaining an active Christian fellowship with the larger body of the Communion of Saints. Indeed, the central doctrine that she deploys throughout her later writings is that believers are, whilst still inhabitants of the earth, able to re-fashion themselves in accordance with the chimes, bells, and organs of Heaven. This doctrine is rooted in Paul’s words to the Philippians,

---

<sup>5</sup> Northrop Frye, *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays 1979-1988* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), p. 218.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) (Philippians 3: 13-19)

Building on her typological understanding of Paul's declaration that 'we have,' in part, 'already attained' the 'prize,' I want to suggest that through imaginatively entering the gardens and the Temples depicted in the Bible, Rossetti spatially expresses the beliefs that underpin the patristic model of trinitarian personhood. By repeatedly contemplating the 'walk' described in Philippians as a journey from the Garden of Eden, through 'the way of sorrows' (*CS*, p. 374), and towards citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem, she exemplifies her method of typological hermeneutics which brings this patristic model into the popular imagination.

Towards the end of *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*, Rossetti includes her 1856 poem, 'After this the Judgment' (*CP*, p. 178-80). It begins,

As eager homebound traveller to the goal,  
Or steadfast seeker on an unsearched main,  
Or martyr panting for an aureole,  
My fellow-pilgrims pass me, and attain  
That hidden mansion of perpetual peace  
Where keen desire and hope dwell free from pain:  
That gate stands open of perennial ease;  
I view the glory till I partly long,  
Yet lack the fire of love which quickens these.  
O passing Angel, speed me with a song,  
A melody of heaven to reach my heart  
And rouse me to the race and make me strong;  
Till in such music I take up my part  
Swelling those Hallelujahs full of rest, (lines 1-14)

By using the poetic form of the *terza rima* and by incorporating references to ‘song,’ ‘melody,’ and ‘music’ (lines 10,11,13) into her consideration of the individual’s journey towards ‘That hidden mansion of perpetual peace’ (line 5), she highlights the spiral dynamics of the ascent to heaven and the significance of musicality and liturgical devotion in strengthening and sustaining the believer on her long spiritual journey. Indeed, through her syntactic correspondence of ‘long’ and ‘strong’ with ‘song’ (lines 8,12,10), she illuminates the intense longing the music of the liturgy initiates in the individual believer and the spiritual strength that, she believes, can be gained by participation in its practice. Added to this, by linking her speaker’s longing to receive the ‘fire of love which quickens’ (line 9), she develops Augustine’s metaphor of spiritual fire and articulates an intense desire for authentic supernatural communion.

In ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ by elaborating on the connection that she draws in ‘After this the Judgment’ between the ‘fire of love which quickens’ (line 9), the souls of the saints on their pilgrimage, and the music of the liturgy, Rossetti continues to depict communal worship as pertaining to the *upward* movement of flames and odours. I want to suggest that by comparing ‘After this the Judgment’ and ‘Resurgam’ with a poem that she includes in the latter part of this sequence, “Love is strong as Death” (*CP*, p. 494), the development of her trinitarian model of theology can be demonstrated. In “Love is strong as Death,” she repeats the alignment of the words ‘strong’ and ‘song’ (lines 6, 8). However, rather than conflate them with the ‘heart’ of the speaker (‘After this the Judgment,’ line 11), she uses them to frame her contemplation of ‘Jesu’s Name’ (line 7).

As flames that consume the mountains, as winds which coerce the sea,  
Thy men of renown show forth Thy might in the clutch of death:



Down they go into silence, yet the Trump of the Jubilee  
 Swells not Thy praise as swells it the breathless pause of their breath.

What is the flame of their fire, if so I may catch the flame;  
 What the strength of their strength, if also I may wax strong?  
 The flaming fire of their strength is the love of Jesu's Name,  
 In Whom their death is life, their silence utters a song.

Here, the 'I' (lines 5, 6) can be understood as Rossetti's devotional persona, who, immediately preceding the inclusion of the poem in *The Face of the Deep*, argues,

I being weak and timid would fain serve God without great terrors and tortures; but I comprehend that amongst His most noble and ardent lovers some are so *rapt out of themselves in Jesus Christ* that terrors appal them not, nor tortures abate their spirit. God is good in their height, and in my lowness, accepting the one and not having rejected the other. (emphasis mine, p. 293)

Suggesting that it is their engagement with Divine grace, and their participation in the ongoing praise of the Communion of Saints, that enables the 'noble and ardent lovers' of Christ to depart 'out of themselves' and 'catch the flame' (line 5) that will carry them to Heaven, Rossetti contends that identity is meaningless apart from God. After using her commentary to draw a sharp distinction between her 'weak and timid' self and the strength of the saints, she uses the two verses of the poem to close the chasm between earthly desire and heavenly aspiration, conflating the 'I' of weakness with the 'men of renown' (line 2) and articulating the acquisition of the 'fire' that her speaker in 'After this the Judgment' claims 'quickens' the saints but not herself (line 9).

The notion of 'catch[ing] the flame' (line 5) is indicative of Rossetti's treatment of the imbibing relationship between the believer and God and between each member of the Community of Saints. In *The Face of the Deep*, she prays that God would 'grant that the shining lights' of believers 'may shine, glow,

radiate, more and more, and that the lookers-on glorifying the Father of all, may *catch fire*' (emphasis mine, p. 114). In "Love is strong as Death," by speaking of Love's 'strength' (line 6) in terms of contagious 'flames' (line 1) and 'breath' (line 4), she alludes to the uncontainable and overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit that was experienced by the earliest believers.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. (Acts 2:1-3)

In the first verse of her poem, by rhyming 'sea' with 'Jubilee' (lines 1, 3), Rossetti recalls St. John's vision of the 'sea of glass mingled with fire' where the saints praise God and rejoice with 'harps' (Revelation 15:2). By simultaneously alluding to the 'flames that consume the mountains' and the 'winds which coerce the sea' (line 1), she intertwines Revelation's 'sea' of rejoicing with the 'rushing mighty wind' of Acts and voices her belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to unite and inspire the Communion of Saints. In addition, when the reference in Acts, to the 'cloven tongues like as of fire' that 'sat upon each' believer, is read alongside the desire to 'catch the flame' (line 5) that will strengthen the speaker to endure trials and will speed her to Heaven, Rossetti's understanding that the Holy Spirit is 'the strength' and the 'flaming fire' of the saints (lines 6-7) is illuminated. After structurally drawing the words 'strength' and 'flame' together through insistent repetition (lines 5-7), Rossetti ends her poem with the suggestion that the 'flaming fire' (line 7) of the Holy Spirit will enable the saints to find that their 'death is life' and that 'their silence utters a song' (line 8). The paradoxical concept of 'silence' uttering 'a song' (line 8) can be understood in terms of both the claim, made in the first verse, that the 'men of renown show

forth Thy might in the clutch of death' by remaining jubilant as they descend 'Down [...] into silence' (lines 2-3), and the interpretation Rossetti offers of Revelation 8:1, 'And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.' In *The Face of the Deep*, by interpreting this biblical silence as a 'figure of suspense' (p. 242), she links it to the place of waiting and shadows that her later poetry repeatedly alludes to.

At the start of *Time Flies*, Rossetti claims that 'Stars, like Christians, utter their silent voice to all lands and their speechless words to the ends of the world' before reasoning that 'Christians are called to be like stars, luminous, steadfast, majestic, attractive' (January 2; p. 2). Written in a contemplation of how Christians 'translate God's law into the universal law of all mankind' (ibid.), the notion of being 'called to be like stars' alludes to the perseverance that Peter claims believers need to demonstrate 'until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts' (2 Peter 1:19). In my introduction, I discussed Rossetti's poem 'A Christmas Carol for my Godchildren' and suggested that in this, she interprets the 'star' (line 2) of the nativity as the Holy Spirit who enables all believers to live godly lives of perseverance as they guide others to Christ. The notion that all 'Christians are called to be like stars' also recalls God's promise to Abraham: 'I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the *stars of the heaven*, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies' (emphasis mine, Genesis 22:17). By highlighting the star-like qualities of luminosity, steadfastness, and attractiveness that Christians should attain, Rossetti typologically links Abraham's 'seed' to the 'great multitude' of believers depicted in Revelation 7:9. Understood in this way, the 'silence' of each believer can be seen to pertain to the silencing of individual

voices as they are blended into the songs of the wider fellowship where the saints enter a state of multiplicity and shared anticipation as they wait for the coming of the New Jerusalem.

Towards the end of *Verses*, Rossetti articulates the notion of communal anticipation in her poem “Then shall ye shout” (*CP*, p. 536).

It seems an easy thing  
Mayhap one day to sing  
Yet the next day  
We cannot sing or say

Keep silence with good heart,  
While silence fits our part:  
Another day  
We shall both sing and say.

Keep silence, counting time  
To strike in at the chime:  
Prepare to sound,—  
Our part is coming round.

Can we not sing or say?  
In silence let us pray,  
And mediate  
Our love-song while we wait.

Recommending that believers should ‘Keep silence with good heart, | While silence fits our part’ (line 5), the poem depicts the space of eschatological waiting between the depths of the earth and the heights of Heaven. In *Verses*, by adding a title derived from Scripture, Rossetti exemplifies the typological properties of this space. Joshua 6:10 reads, ‘And Joshua commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout [...] until the day I bid you shout: *then shall ye shout*’ (italics in the original). Throughout “Then shall ye shout,” by encouraging her readers to ‘Prepare to sound’ (line 11), Rossetti implicitly links them to the Israelites who circled around Jericho with their trumpets in preparation for Joshua’s command to claim their inheritance and take the city. Thus, she

conflates the nineteenth-century Christian with the Old Testament Israelite as she offers a typological understanding of the experience of waiting upon God. In addition to clarifying the apparent paradoxes of the proclamation, ‘their silence utters a song’ (line 8); when her references to the silence of anticipation are understood typologically in terms of Joshua’s command, ‘ye shall not shout,’ her engagement with the notion of obtaining a shared identity is made apparent.

In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti suggests that ‘Heavenly large-heartedness seems scarcely to know *me* from *thee*, but in its measure reflects the Mind of Christ when He said: “All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them”’ (italics in the original, p.181-2). In addition to pertaining to a dynamic conception of trinitarian identity which serves to deconstruct the popular enlightenment model which conceives of the self as a contained subject, Rossetti’s emphasis on the fluidity of the terms ‘me’ and ‘thee’ offers a framework through which to understand the integration of personal with communal pronouns in her late devotional poetry. Indeed, throughout ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ by positioning several verses which are articulated using the first person pronoun among a selection of verses which are articulated from a communal perspective, she encourages a reading whereby the ‘I’ of the former escapes from the prison of individualism and reaches incorporation in the larger Community of Saints.

In the opening poem of the sequence, “The Holy City, New Jerusalem,” Rossetti introduces the practice of intertwining the universal, individual, and communal properties of the Heavens when she incorporates her speaker into the wider body of ‘Thy citizens’ (line 5). It begins,

Jerusalem is built of gold,  
Of crystal, pearl, and gem:

Oh fair thy lustres manifold,  
 Thou fair Jerusalem!  
 Thy citizens who walk in white  
 Have nought to do with day or night,  
 And drink the river of delight. (lines 1-7)

Here, she blends the ‘spiritual integrity’ with ‘lyrical excellence’ that David Shaw argues all typological poetry exists to express when she integrates the imagery of Revelation with other biblical phraseology through her use of regular rhythm and repetition.<sup>6</sup> For instance, although she describes New Jerusalem as ‘fair’ (lines 3,4), it is a word that does not appear once in Revelation. However, the fact that it is repeated insistently throughout the Song of Songs and the book of Ezekiel, to describe love for a beloved and a love of jewels and precious stones, is suggestive of Rossetti’s typological understanding of the Bible whereby words and phrases used in the Old Testament are given eschatological realisation in the New.<sup>7</sup> Through her interpretation of New Jerusalem as the fulfilment of the ‘fair’ bride of the Song of Songs and the ‘fair’ jewels of Ezekiel, Rossetti exemplifies the practice of anticipating ultimate typological realisation through a systematic reading of the Bible. By introducing the word ‘fair’ in conjunction with heaven’s ‘lustres manifold’ before positioning it both structurally and figuratively as the central axis of the verse in the following line, ‘Thou fair Jerusalem’ (lines 3-4), she introduces a liturgical dimension to the poem as she draws attention to its highly wrought structure and enters into a state of supernatural communion.

This dimension is exemplified more clearly in the following stanza.

Jerusalem makes melody

---

<sup>6</sup> David W. Shaw, ‘Poetry and Religion,’ in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Antony H. Harrison (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub., 2002) pp. 457-474 (p. 459).

<sup>7</sup> Song of Songs, 1:8,15-16, 2:10, 13, 4:1,7,10, 5:9, 6:1, 10, 7:6, and Ezekiel 16:17, 16:39, 23:26.

For simple joy of heart:  
 An organ full of compass she,  
 One-tuned thro' every part:  
 While not to day or night belong  
 Her matins and her evensong,  
 The one thanksgiving of her throng. (lines 8-14)

By figuring the self-sacrificial relationships that exist amongst members of the Community of Saints as interdependent with the individual's relationship with God, Rossetti highlights the spiritual significance of the practice of 'matins' and 'evensong' (line 13). Furthermore, through the continued use of a *terza rima* scheme and a regular trimeter and tetrameter rhythm, she structurally imitates the musical qualities of liturgy. In his discussion of the significance of music in the liturgical practices of the church, Raymond Warren writes that 'the most obvious usefulness of music in worship is to present a mood, attitude or gesture in a direct and immediately comprehensive way and sustain it for as long as necessary.'<sup>8</sup> Engaging with this element of musicality in her depiction of the 'melody' of the saints through the 'organ' of worship (lines 10), Rossetti highlights the permeable boundaries between believers in the nineteenth-century church and the 'throng' of heaven (line 14). In addition, the highly-wrought rhythmic structure of the verse further exemplifies Warren's suggestion as it poetically dramatises the jubilant mood of the saints. In *Time Flies*, Rossetti links the act of singing and chanting Psalms to spiritual progression and exemplifies the suggestions offered in "The Holy City," that by taking her 'part' in the 'melody' (lines 11,8) of heaven, the believer integrates herself into the Community of Saints:

No single note however ravishing amounts to music: musical it may be, but not music.

---

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Warren, 'Music and the Liturgy,' in *Language and the Worship of the Church*, ed. by David Jasper and R.C.D. Jasper (London : Macmillan, 1989) pp. 196-211 (p. 197).

Therefore, when our Christian heaven is by condescension to man's limited conceptions represented as a heaven of music, that figure stamps it as a heaven, not of monotony, but of variety.

For in music one sound leads unavoidably to a different sound, one harmony paves the way to a diverse harmony.

A heaven of music seems rather a heaven of endless progression, of inexhaustible variety, than a heaven of monotony. (*TF*, February 8; p. 29)

Rather than figuring heaven as a static place of rest, by using music to indicate that it is a place of 'endless progression,' Rossetti is able to link it to earth and suggest that the same heavenly vibrations can be felt by all. Thus, she encourages each believer to conceive of her identity as an element of a larger whole and to enter the 'throng' of Heaven ('The Holy City,' line 14) whilst remaining in the world.

In the sestet to her sonnet, 'What are these lovely ones, yea, what are these?' (*CP*, p. 497), Rossetti writes,

And wherefore have you harps and wherefore palms,  
And wherefore crowns, O ye who walk in white?  
Because our happy hearts are chanting psalms,  
Endless Te Deum for the ended fight;  
While thro' the everlasting lapse of calms  
We cast our crowns before the Lamb our Might. (lines 9-14)

By highlighting the angelic delight in the sincere practice of liturgical devotion, she emphasises the belief that every human action has eternal repercussions and exemplifies the significance and power of worship. Indeed, the axis of the sonnet comes in line 11, 'Because our happy hearts are chanting psalms.' Establishing the connection between the saints in heaven and the ordinary believer through the word 'Because,' Rossetti's discreet switch in the use of pronouns indicates integration from the earthly and into the Heavenly realms. Indeed, in moving from the use of 'you' and 'ye,' to 'our' (lines 9, 10, 11), she highlights the doctrine that Christ is able to cleanse and 'wash' each believer 'daily' (*SF*, p.



350) with his blood, thus repeatedly endowing her with the white robes of the saints. Following this, in the proclamation, ‘We cast our crowns before the Lamb our Might’ (line 14), Rossetti depicts the movement from sinner to saint through the act of willing sacrifice. Her emphasis on the possibility of integration into the Community of Saints through Christ’s intervention can be used to enrich her earlier devotional poetry with its typological implications. For instance, when ‘After this the Judgment’ is read in conjunction with the shared pronouns in the sestet of ‘What are these lovely ones,’ the division between yearning for a relationship with God and finding a ‘part’ in ‘those Hallelujahs’ (lines 13-14) can be broken down.

As I have suggested, Rossetti’s conflation of the notion that the saints in Heaven rejoice ‘Because our happy hearts are chanting psalms,’ with the idea that the believer becomes integrated into the Community of Saints through the chanting of psalms, can best be understood in the context of her investment in the ritualist theology of Tractarianism. In chapter one, I spoke of how, in her poem, “Escape to the mountains,” Rossetti uses the word ‘happy’ as a substitute for ‘saved.’ Throughout their writings, the leaders of the Oxford Movement emphasise that the liturgical practices of the Tractarian Church are divinely ordained and are firmly rooted in the ancient Church. Considering both the implications of the word ‘happy’ and the notion of liturgy as divinely ordained, I want to suggest that, in ‘What are these lovely ones,’ Rossetti can be seen to depict liturgical ritualism as a vehicle through which believers can join the praise of the saints in Heaven as their ‘happy hearts’ (line 11) express the joy of salvation.

Arguing that the Psalms have become ‘human sympathies attuned to angelic melodies,’ and linking them to St. John’s vision of the New Heavens and New earth by claiming that they are as “‘the leaves of the Tree” which are “for the healing of the nations,”” Isaac Williams suggests that through them, ‘the Word made Flesh is [...] incorporated into our spiritual being.’<sup>9</sup> Commenting on how this incorporation takes place, in their commentary on Psalm 119:54, ‘Thy statutes have been my songs: in the house of my pilgrimage,’ John Mason Neale and Richard Frederick Littledale argue,

If we do no more than *read* GOD’s Statutes, we may so forget them when the Bible is out of our hands, that a fresh perusal does no more than remind us that the words are not new to us; but if we learn them because we delight in them, they will haunt our memories like snatches of music, and come back again and again before our thoughts. And there may very well be here a direct reference to psalmody, to the devotional use of religious poetry, and those psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs wherewith the saints make melody in their hearts to the LORD. Such singing as this is mighty as was David’s harp to drive away the evil spirit; nay, to invoke the presence of the HOLY SPIRIT Himself, as when the minstrel played before Elisha. (*italics in the original*)<sup>10</sup>

Rossetti demonstrates her adherence to the suggestion that the liturgical practice of believers ‘is mighty as was David’s harp’ in a sonnet that she composed for *The Face of the Deep*. Also included towards the end of ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ the sonnet expresses the ‘sweet’ (lines 5, 6) nature of the praise and devotion of the saints.

The joy of Saints, like incense turned to fire,  
In golden censers, soars acceptable;  
And high their heavenly hallelujahs swell  
Desirous still with still-fulfilled desire.  
Sweet thrill the harpstrings of the heavenly choir,  
Most sweet their voice while love is all they tell;  
Where love is all in all and all is well

---

<sup>9</sup> Isaac Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 8 vols. (London: Rivingtons, 1864), i, p. 17, 29.

<sup>10</sup> J.M. Neale and R.F. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Medieval Writers*, 4 volumes, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Joseph Masters and Co, 1869- 1883), iv, p. 46.

Because their work is love and love their hire.  
 All robed in white and all with palm in hand,  
 Crowns too they have of gold and thrones of gold;  
 The street is golden which their feet have trod.  
 Or on a sea of glass and fire they stand:  
 And none of them is young, and none is gold,  
 Except as perfect by the Will of God. (*FD*, p. 181/ *CP*, p. 493)

By claiming that love is ‘their hire’ (line 8), Rossetti uses typology to suggest that the basis of divine Love is not integral to the identity of the saints but that it is lent to them as a gift. In her roundel, ‘Jerusalem of fire’ (*CP*, p. 489), she introduces the concept of the ‘hire’ of saintliness when she writes,

Thy bridal white attire,  
 A palm-branch from thy stem:  
 Thy holiness their hire,  
 Jerusalem. (lines 8-11)

In ‘Soeur Louise de la Misericorde (1674),’ the speaker laments, ‘Where is the hire for which my life was hired?’ (line 4). Throughout ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ by answering the question through using the language of Scripture, Rossetti is able to offer a response. In his gospel, Matthew records Jesus’ articulation of the Kingdom of God through the parable of the householder who went out to hire men for his vineyard. At the end of the day, ‘the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first’ (Matthew 20:8). By using the word ‘hire’ in her poetic contemplations of the New Jerusalem as depicted in Revelation and by conflating the ‘penny,’ that Matthew claims each labourer received, with the ‘bridal white attire’ of Heaven (‘Jerusalem of fire, line 8), Rossetti implicitly demonstrates the eschatological implications of the parable and envisions the believer as one its ‘labourers.’

In ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ the three roundels which follow the three introductory poems depicting the splendours of the city of New Jerusalem

further exemplify Rossetti's engagement with the notions of 'hire' and 'bridal attire.' Highlighting the virtues of 'The King's Daughter' ("She shall be brought unto the King," *CP*, p. 489-90, line 1), the 'Virgin queen' ('Who is this that cometh up not alone,' *CP*, p. 490, line 7), and the 'Bride' of the King ('Who sits with the King in His Throne?', *CP*, p. 490, line 1), each considers the process whereby the bride or the daughter of the King puts on the immortality of Christ and expresses her joy at having attained a place in the heavenly Communion of Saints. In "She shall be brought unto the King," Rossetti describes the King's daughter as integrated in the 'choruses of heaven' (line 3) when she writes, 'Perfect her notes in the perfect harmonies; | With tears wiped away, no conscience of sin' (lines 5-6). In 'Who sits with the King in His Throne,' she further illustrates this integration of voice and identity alongside the concept of the 'hire' of holiness when she declares, 'His Glory, her glory, where glorious she glows at His side' (line 3).

Throughout *Verses*, Rossetti stresses that it is the believer's position at God's 'side' that enables her to 'glow' and take on the 'luminous' nature of a star as she reflects Christ's glory (*TF*, p. 2). The nature of this process, and the significance of the heavenly robes that make each believer 'glow,' is made apparent in Revelation 7:14 when John speaks of believers who have come 'out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.' In *Annus Domini*, Rossetti offers a meditation on this verse in her prayer,

O LORD Jesus Christ, in Whose Blood the saints wash their robes and make them white, wash also us sinners, I entreat Thee, and wash our sin-stained righteousness in Thy Blood. In Thy Blood poured fourth after death, wash us daily, wash us wholly, wash us at the hour of death, that so we may be found clean in the day of judgment.' (prayer no. 350)

Here, the triple repetition of the words ‘wash’ and ‘blood’ highlights the trinitarian framework within which Rossetti reads the Scriptures and echoes the liturgical practice of repetitive chanting through which, she believes, individuals are transformed into saints.

**ii. ‘A garden in a garden:’ A typological reading of Rossetti’s enclosed gardens**

Following a description of the beauty, harmony, and unity that characterises the eternal realm, in “The Holy City, New Jerusalem,” Rossetti depicts the garden of Paradise where the saints will rejoice after the process of being washed clean in Christ’s blood.

Jerusalem a garden is,  
A garden of delight;  
Leaf, flower and fruit make fair her trees,  
Which see not day or night:  
Beside her River clear and calm  
The tree of Life grows with the Palm,  
For triumph and for food and balm. (lines 15-21)

In the poems that follow, instead of contemplating the space of cleaning as one of preparation for later incorporation within this ‘garden of delight’ (line 16), she speaks of it as a space which overlaps with it and lies in its shadow. In 1836, whilst he was developing his theory of *Via Media* and arguing that the Church of England stood in the ‘middle way,’ John Henry Newman gave a sermon entitled ‘The Intermediate State.’ In this, he argues against the popular yet ‘frightful notion’ of Purgatory where Christians are ‘kept in fire or other torment, till [...] they are at length fitted for their glorious kingdom.’ He finds evidence in Scripture that Christians rest ‘incomplete [...] in a state of rest’ in a ‘paradise’

which, although ‘pure and peaceful,’ is not heaven. Reflecting on this paradise, he suggests that ‘No emblem could express more vividly the refreshment and sweetness of that blessed rest, than to call it the garden in which the first man was placed [...] Doubtless, it is full of excellent visions and wonderful revelations.’ Continuing with the imagery of the garden, he claims that the paradise within Hades is a place where the redeemed ‘may have time for growing in all holy things, and perfecting the inward development of the good seed sown in their hearts.’<sup>11</sup> As I will demonstrate, whilst adding her own nuances, Rossetti adheres to the principles behind Newman’s re-conception of the place where the saints wash their robes in Christ’s blood. Indeed, by following out the implications of Augustine’s notion that, the further the soul ascends towards the Divine the easier their journey becomes, she presents the process of Divine cleansing in the spatial terms of the enclosed garden of rest, refreshment, nourishment, and growth.

In *Seek and Find*, Rossetti argues that, for Christians, ‘the land of the shadow of death is no longer the dominion of the king of terrors, but rather a tiring-closet for the bride of the King of Kings.’ She suggests that it is in this ‘tiring-closet’ that the ‘bride’

prepares to put on incorruption and immortality (1 Cor. xv. 52, 53), meanwhile making melody in her heart to the Lord. We seem to hear her singing a psalm of thanksgiving, the very psalm of her risen Saviour: “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places. My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell. Thou wilt show me the path of life” (Ps. xvi. 6, 9-11; Acts ii. 22-28). (*SF*, p. 150)

After outlining the need for spiritual nourishment and protection, by linking the boundary ‘lines’ of Psalm 16:6 with the ‘land of the shadow of death,’ Rossetti

---

<sup>11</sup> John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons 1834-42*, 8 vols (London, Oxford, and Cambridge: Rivingtons 1870), iii, pp. 367-387 (p. 371-4).

introduces the concept of purgatory or Hades as an enclosed garden. By relating this enclosed space to the 'path of the life' within which David rejoices (Psalm 16:11), she renders it in relation to the dynamic soul of the believer and emphasises the possibility for spiritual growth after death.

In his investigation of Rossetti's religious poetry, Jerome McGann contends that the premillenarian concept of psychopannychy 'during which the soul is placed in a state of 'sleeping' or suspension' as it awaits the Last Day, is 'the single most important enabling principle in Rossetti's religious poetry' and that 'no other idea generated such a network of poetic possibilities for her verse.'<sup>12</sup> In her article, 'What the Dead Are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti,' Linda Marshall speaks of the disjunction between McGann's premillenarian interpretation of Rossetti's theology and the idea of the more conscious paradise that Newman describes.<sup>13</sup> She attempts to reconcile this disjunction by suggesting that whilst in her earlier poetry, Rossetti speaks of the intermediate abode as a place of timeless insensibility, after 1858 she came to the belief that the intermediate state was a place where 'the soul is lovingly aware both of the living and the gathered dead' (p. 58). Building on Rossetti's conflation of the convent and the grave, and developing her representation of the mystical state in which the believer is able to encounter God, I want to suggest that whilst Marshall highlights a very important and often neglected area of study for Rossetti scholars in her discussion of Hades, the doctrine of psychopannychy is not necessarily irreconcilable with the idea that souls are conscious of their surroundings in the

---

<sup>12</sup> Jerome J. McGann, 'The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti,' in *Victorian Women Poets. Emily Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti* ed. by Joseph Bristow (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1995), pp. 167-188 (p. 176).

<sup>13</sup> Linda E. Marshall, 'What the Dead are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti', *Victorian Newsletter*, 72 (1987), 55- 60 (p. 55).

intermediate paradise. Indeed, although Rossetti's conception of the heavenly realms does change over time, in her later poetry, she is able to reconcile her earlier theology with her later understandings and typologically reflect meanings back onto her earlier verses so as to offer parabolic interpretations.

In 1849, Rossetti wrote a sonnet which she entitled, 'On Keats' (CP, p. 700).

A garden in a garden: a green spot  
 Where all is green: most fitting slumber-place  
 For the strong man grown weary of a race  
 Soon over. Unto him a goodly lot  
 Hath fallen in fertile ground; there thorns are not,  
 But his own daisies: silence, full of grace,  
 Surely hath shed a quiet on his face:  
 His earth is but sweet leaves that fall and rot.  
 What was his record of himself, ere he  
 Went from us? *Here lies one whose name was writ*  
*In water:* while the chilly shadows flit  
 Of sweet Saint Agnes' Eve; while basil springs,  
 His name, in every humble heart that sings,  
 Shall be a fountain of love, verily. (italics in the original)

By introducing Keats' grave in terms of 'a garden in a garden' (line 1), she brings to the fore the complications inherent in using garden symbolism. This symbolism is rooted in the typological realisation articulated in John 19:41-42:

Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in this garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

By implicitly positioning the image of the Keats' burial firmly within a biblical framework whilst simultaneously linking the place of Jesus' burial and resurrection to both the 'goodly lot' (line 4) that is the Garden of Eden and the enclosed garden of the Song of Songs, Rossetti initiates an interpretation more profound than she has previously been given credit for. Indeed, rather than upholding a quiet Christian dogma throughout 'On Keats,' I want to suggest that



she succeeds in 'Christianising' Keats' atheistic ideology. Although this remains implicit in an isolated reading of the sonnet, when it is read in conjunction with the poems contained within 'New Jerusalem and its Citizens,' Rossetti's Christianising impulse becomes more apparent.

The symbolism in 'On Keats' can be understood in terms of typological anticipation when it is considered in conjunction with "Let them rejoice in their beds" (CP, p. 494).

Crimson as the rubies, crimson as the roses,  
 Crimson as the sinking sun,  
 Singing on his crimsoned bed each saint reposes,  
 Fought his fight, his battle won;  
 Till the rosy east the day of days discloses,  
 All his work, save waiting, done.

Far above the stars, while underneath the daises,  
 Resting, for his race is run,  
 Unto Thee his heart each quiet saint upraises,  
 God the Father, Spirit Son;  
 Unto Thee his heart, unto Thee his praises,  
 O Lord God, the Three in One.

Although composed only three years after 'On Keats,' Rossetti's decision to position the poem amongst her later depictions of 'New Jerusalem and its Citizens' enhances it with additional spiritual dimensions. Most significantly, when the repeated mention of 'crimson' is read alongside the conception of the 'hire' ('Jerusalem of fire,' line 10, 'The joy of saints,' line 8) of the white robes of holiness, the process of being washed clean by Christ's blood is exemplified. Indeed, by depicting the saints as 'Crimson as the rubies, crimson as the roses' (line 1), Rossetti anticipates the image, presented in "Before the Throne, and before the Lamb" (CP, p. 495), of a paradise where 'raiment is white of blood-steeped linen slowly spun' (line 8). Her conflation of this process of cleansing with the space of ultimate rest demonstrates the complexities of her typological

methodology. Indeed, when the proclamation in the King James Version of Psalm 149, 'Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds' (Psalm 149:5), is read in the context of the entire Psalm, the suggestion is that the praise of the saints is so continuous that it does not waver through the night. Considered alongside the translation in the Prayer Book Psalter, 'Let the faithful be joyful in glory: let them rejoice in their ranks,' this understanding of the proclamation becomes more apparent. Nonetheless, it is significant that by depicting the saints 'in' rather than 'upon' their beds, Rossetti uses a single word from the Prayer Book Version of the Psalm to give her interpretation of the King James Version an added dimension. Earlier in the chapter I quoted from 'After this the Judgment.' In this poem, Rossetti indicates incorporation into the wider Community of Saints when she has her speaker find a place 'in' the 'Hallelujahs full of rest' (line 14). This incorporation enables her to find the 'fire of love' she that was lacking (line 9) and join the saints as they 'lifted up' their voices to the 'Love of God' (line 21). With this in mind, Rossetti's later depiction of the saints resting 'in' their beds can be seen to allude to incorporation *in* the larger body of the united Christian community as well as to the promised state of rest.

In "Let them rejoice in their beds," by speaking of 'each saint' (line 3) rejoicing in God whilst remaining 'underneath the daises, | Resting, for his race is run' (lines 6-7), Rossetti envisions the space of the grave within an eschatological context and presents the place where the saints are washed with Christ's blood as one of peace but also one of movement. Indeed, the allusion to the Augustinian process whereby 'each saint upraises' (line 9) to the 'Three in One' (line 12) corresponds to the growth of the daises upon the grave. When 'On Keats' is read in conjunction with these images of spiritual upraising and

rejoicing, Rossetti's typological impulse is made apparent. Read in isolation, when Rossetti writes that Keats is buried beneath '*his own daises*' (line 6), she appears to be alluding simply to the daises of '*Endymion*,' and, when combined with the implicit reference to the '*basil*' (line 12) of '*Isabella*,' it would seem the garden depicted is a straight-forward visualisation of Keats' own poetic persona.<sup>14</sup> However, the fact that the symbolism of the poem corresponds so closely to Rossetti's utilisation of biblical imagery presented in "Let them rejoice in their beds," lends the poem an additional typological interpretation whereby the '*daises*' can also be read as symbolic of the activity of the soul.

In chapter three, I discussed Rossetti's treatment of Jeanie in '*Goblin Market*' who, after eating goblin fruits, '*pined and pined away*' (line 154) and eventually died. '*To this day*,' Lizzie claims, '*no grass will grow*' on her grave. The fact that she '*planted daisies there a year ago | that never blow*' (lines 158-161) suggests the stagnation of Jeanie's soul. With this barren space of Jeanie's grave in mind, the suggestion that Keats' '*slumber-place [...] Hath fallen in fertile-ground*' (lines 2, 5) pertains to his ongoing life. Whether or not this life can be seen as indicative of belonging to the Community of Saints is uncertain but the fact that '*every humble heart that sings*' his name is likened to '*a fountain of love*' (lines 13-14) is suggestive of his immortality. Certainly, by alluding to the '*race*' (line 3) of Philippians 3:13-19, and echoing the Song of Songs 4:12, '*A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed*,' Rossetti roots her contemplation Keats in a scriptural framework.

---

<sup>14</sup> John Keats, '*Endymion*,' and '*Isabella or The Pot of Basil: A Story from Boccaccio*,' in *The Complete Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Paul Wright (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2001), pp. 60-141, and pp. 190-205.

Antony Harrison suggests that ‘The “fountain of love” constituted by Keats’ poetry fed the hundreds of amatory poems Rossetti wrote’ and claims that ‘Keats was the single Romantic writer whose influence on her style, her thematic preoccupations, her dominant metaphors, and the dramatic situations of her poems was inescapable during the most productive years of her life.’<sup>15</sup> Moving beyond this claim, I want to suggest that a more reciprocal relationship between the poets can be traced. Indeed, rather than merely considering how Rossetti’s ‘amatory poems’ were ‘fed’ by Keats’ writings, the idea that her devotional poetry offers a lens through which to approach Keats is equally significant. In her book, *Consuming Keats: Nineteenth Century Re-Presentations in Art and Literature*, Sarah Wootton argues against the notion that a stable poetic entity that can be recovered. She suggests reading Keats’ afterlife as a ‘series or network of transmutations.’ ‘We do not inherit the ‘real’ Keats or even a cultural construction,’ she writes, ‘but a multiplicity of economic, poetic, political, and sexual selves formed through the perpetual dialogue between the past and present.’<sup>16</sup> With this in mind, Harrison’s suggestion that Rossetti’s poetry was ‘fed’ by Keats’ writings becomes problematic. Recognising this, rather than conceiving of her as a passive recipient of Romantic verse, I want to suggest that Rossetti brings the exegesis which constitutes her sense of identity into a lively dialogue with her Romantic predecessors.

By mapping the Romantic conception that identity is as an effect and register of reading onto her own poetic contemplations of the practical translation of biblical precepts, Rossetti suggests that the ideology of the individual is

---

<sup>15</sup> Antony H. Harrison, *Victorian Poets and the Politics of Culture: Discourse and Ideology* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998) p. 159.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Wootton, *Consuming Keats: Nineteenth Century Re-Presentations in Art and Literature* (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 1.

constituted through a 'perpetual dialogue' with the words of Scripture. In 'On Keats,' by simultaneously relating individual words to Keats' poetry and the language of the Bible, she is able to speak of enclosed gardens in terms of individual identity and link those in Romantic literature to those in Scripture. Building on Rossetti's depiction of the enclosed garden in 'On Keats' as a cultivated a picturesque garden, Wootton argues that, through the use of words such as 'goodly' and 'fertile,' she 'generates a bodily intimacy with the dead poet.' She suggests the fertile ground of the poem can be read as a figurative representation of the Keats, through which Rossetti's desires may be fulfilled (Wootton, p. 28). Certainly, reading the poem through the framework of the Song of Songs is suggestive of this interpretation and highlights a conflation between the garden and the female body. There can be no doubt that Rossetti was familiar with the Pre- Raphaelite paintings which allude to the continuing role of the garden as a metaphor for femininity such as Arthur Hughes' 1865 illustration, *April Love*, in which the women's situation within the leafy arbour draws on the spiritual representations of the enclosed garden as a symbol of the Virgin Birth and of female virginity.

In his discussion of the enclosed garden within seventeenth century poetry, Stanley Stewart claims that the frequent appearance in books of hours of the Virgin seated beneath a canopy in a garden, or within a small Gothic structure represents an elaboration of the allegorical convention of the *hortus conclusus* or the "close-locked" garden.<sup>17</sup> He suggests that the allegorical meaning of the Song of Songs 8:10, 'I am a wall, and my breasts like towers',

---

<sup>17</sup> Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 49.

was that Mary separated the dispensations of Law and Grace in that her purification ended the former, her womb gave birth to the latter, and the Church established itself on the truth of both (ibid.). Rossetti's poetics can be seen to incorporate the idea of Mary as an indispensable part of the figurative enclosed garden in view of the recurring correspondences between her, flowers, and the figure of the wall. Indeed, Rossetti's 1856 poem, 'Shut Out' (CP, p. 50-51), which can be read as alluding to Eve's expulsion from the 'delightful land' (line 24), can be understood in terms of the allegorical hortus conclusus in that it speaks of the spirit, or angel, building a wall between Eden and the earth. In response to Eve's request that she be allowed 'some buds to cheer' her 'outcast state' (lines 11-12), the speaker relates,

The spirit was silent; but he took  
Mortar and stone to build a wall;  
He left no loophole great or small  
Thro' which my straining eyes might look. (lines 17-20)

In addition to its implicit allusion to the silence with which Solomon's Temple was built (1 Kings 6:7), the speaker's mention of her 'straining eyes' also relates to early mystical interpretations of the wall of the Song of Songs.

In his commentary on ancient and medieval interpretations of the Song of Songs 2:9, 'My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing [sic] himself through the lattice,' Littledale suggests,

This wall, observes De Lyra, is that thick darkness in which the Law was given on Sinai, through which pierced the lighting-flashes from the hidden glory of GOD. CHRIST Incarnate stood, notes another, as though *behind our wall*, because the Godhead lay hid in our humanity. And because human weakness could not endure His infinity, were He to disclose it He interposed the barrier of flesh, and whatever great work he wrought among men, He did as though hiding behind a wall. He who looks through windows and lattices, is partly seen and partly hides himself: so too our LORD JESUS CHRIST, when He was working

miracles by divine power, and enduring insults in the weakness of the flesh, looked forth as it were through windows and lattices, because while hiding Himself in one way, He showed in another way who He was.

Again, He stands behind *our* wall, that is, our sin and fleshly weakness prevent us from seeing Him constantly, and yet He gives glimpses of Himself, by making, as it were, openings in that wall whereby we can contemplate Him partially. This is the wall to which Hezekiah turned his face and wept, because he could not yet behold his SAVIOUR. The windows whereat we see Him, observes a Greek Father, are our powers of understanding, chiefly exercised when we pray or read Holy Scripture, and as we are so engaged, we see Him at intervals. (*italics in the original*)<sup>18</sup>

Throughout 'New Jerusalem and its Citizens,' Rossetti combines scriptural references with typological inferences as she depicts 'This wall' that Littledale describes. In her sonnet, "Beautiful for situation" (*CP*, p. 491), her figuration of 'all doves on gold or silver wing' flocking 'home thro' agate windows glistening' (lines 6-7) corresponds to and exemplifies the Greek Father's observation that the 'windows whereat we see Him' are 'our powers of understanding.' The glimpse of the 'lovely city in a lovely land' (line 1) and the example of the doves, Rossetti suggests, encourages the believer to 'go | Faint yet pursuing, home on tireless feet' (lines 13-14).

In her earlier contemplation of the splendours of Paradise in her sonnet, 'When wickedness is broken as a tree' (*CP*, p. 488-9), Rossetti had depicted the 'home' of all believers with 'Its bulwarks' as 'salvation fully manned' (line 5). By figuratively illustrating the notion articulated in Isaiah's 'Song of Salvation' that '*God* will appoint salvation *for* walls and bulwarks' (*italics in the original*, Isaiah 26:1), Rossetti is able to link the bulwarks of the Old Testament prophecy to the 'inner ring of saints' and the 'outer ring' of angels (lines 9-10) that she imagines encompassing the New Jerusalem. Towards the end of the sequence, in

---

<sup>18</sup> Richard Frederick Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs: From Ancient and Mediaeval Sources* (New York: Pott & Amery, 1869), p. 88-9.

‘Yea, blessed and holy is he that hath part in the First Resurrection’ (*CP*, p. 496-7), she builds on this illustration of the ‘bulwarks’ of salvation and links it to the concept of epistemological gazing when she writes,

We mark well his bulwarks, we set up his tokens, we gaze, even we,  
On this lustre of God and of Christ, this creature of flawless perfection:  
Yea, blessed and holy is he. (lines 2-4)

Describing the splendours of Mount Zion, Psalm 48:13 reads, ‘Mark well her bulwarks; Consider her palaces; That you may tell it to the generation following.’ By writing that ‘*We* mark well,’ Rossetti incorporates herself and her readers into this ‘generation following.’ However, she does not simply figure this ‘generation’ as a passive inheritor. Rather, by stressing that ‘we’ are permitted to ‘gaze’ on the ‘lustre of God and of Christ,’ she offers a revision of the Psalm in light of the Incarnation. Indeed, by replacing the veneration of Mount Zion with worship for Christ, she re-figures its allusions to bulwarks, walls, and enclosures in light of the Tractarian doctrine of Reserve which, according to Littledale, enables Christ to hide ‘Himself in one way’ whilst showing ‘in another way who He was’ (see above).

In chapter three, I emphasised the medieval basis for Rossetti’s conflation of the contemporary believer with the Apostles, the wise men, and the Virgin Mary. Midway through ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ she asks, ‘The saints have lived that life, but how can I?’ (‘Cast down but not destroyed,’ *CP*, p. 493) before stressing that it is ‘Love’ (‘Every one that is perfect shall be as his master,’ *CP*, p. 498) that enables the individual believer to stand within the ‘inner ring of saints’ (‘When wickedness is broken as a tree,’ *CP*, p. 488-9). Diane D’Amico suggests that, rather than follow the established pattern of concluding an analysis of Rossetti’s poetry with “Sleeping at Last,” which



presents an image of the body resting in the earth, it is ‘far more fitting to choose a poem from the New Jerusalem section of *Verses*.’ She claims that “Beautiful for situation” seems especially appropriate since it speaks of the ‘never-ending state of love’ that Rossetti urged her readers to believe in.<sup>19</sup> Whilst I agree that it is fitting to conclude an analysis of Rossetti’s verse with a poem from ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ my reasoning is based more on a consideration of typological implications of realising love to be the basis upon which ultimate identity in Christ is established. Indeed, I want to suggest that, following ‘The Holy City: New Jerusalem,’ Rossetti does not simply use the sequence to point to the ‘never-ending state of love,’ but that through it, she is able to figuratively enter the anguish and joy inherent in the journey of the saints as they move closer to God and substitute worldly concerns with heavenly peace and the ‘love’ and ‘holiness’ which is their ‘hire’ (‘The joy of Saints,’ line 8, ‘Jerusalem of fire,’ line 10).

Rossetti’s increasing concern to map the parameters of trinitarian personhood onto the model of the shared Community of Saints, both living and dead, can be evidenced in an analysis of her poem, “As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country” (*CP*, p. 492-3). Positioned midway through ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ the poem anticipates the end of the ‘steep and straight’ path to Heaven which ‘ends in shades of trees’ and provides a place where believers ‘sing and wait | And gather palm-branches’ (lines 21-24). Written as a revision of her 1858, poem “‘Rivals’: A Shadow of Dorothea.’” (*CP*, p. 808-9), by replacing the original title with the words of Proverbs 25:25, she avoids the charge of favouritism, which, she argues, ‘is highly objectionable in

---

<sup>19</sup> Diane D’Amico, *Faith Gender and Time* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), p. 171-2.

our love of saints' (*TF*, January 18; p. 16). Thus, she opens up her verse to a more participatory reading. In addition, although she retains the form of the dialogue between the saint and the aspiring believer through which the legend of St Dorothea was passed down, by revising its language and structure, she encourages a reading of it in conjunction with the words of Church liturgy rather than historical documentation.<sup>20</sup>

"Rivals" is based on the legend of St. Dorothea who, around AD 304, was mocked on the way to her execution by a young man, Theophilus who had heard her say she would soon be in a garden. He asked her to send him fruits from her 'garden.' When Dorothea subsequently knelt to pray, a child-like angel came with a basket of roses and apples, which Dorothea asked to be sent to Theophilus. He was subsequently converted to Christianity and later became a Christian martyr.<sup>21</sup> The fact that Edward Burne-Jones chose to illustrate this incident in stained glass, both Algernon Charles Swinburne and Gerard Manley Hopkins compose poems about it, and George Eliot names the central protagonist of her novel *Middlemarch* after the saint, indicates that Rossetti's interest in St. Dorothea is far from idiosyncratic.<sup>22</sup> Considering that, following her entry for the Feast of St. Aegidius in *Time Flies*, she claims that she quotes 'at second hand from "The Golden Legend"' (September 1; p. 169), it is likely that this is where her knowledge of the legend derives. Here, the story of Dorothea's

---

<sup>20</sup> Rev. S. Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints; Volume the Second, February* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1914), pp. 176-177.

<sup>21</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, ed. by David Hugh Farmer, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 140

<sup>22</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'For a Picture of St. Dorothea' in *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 4 vols. (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918), i, p. 7-8, and Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'St. Dorothy,' in *Poems and Ballads* (London: William Heinemann, 1925-7), pp. 238-252. In his discussion of Hopkins' poetic forms, Matthew Campbell discusses how, in the second (1868) version of his poem, he introduced a 'particular beat' into it. See, *Rhythm and Will and Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 191.

beheading and Theophilus' conversion is grounded in the language of the Song of Songs. For instance, the narrative records that when the child came to Theophilus and presented to him the basket, he declared, 'These be the roses and apples that my sister Dorothy hath sent to thee from Paradise, the garden of her spouse' before vanishing away.<sup>23</sup>

In "Rivals," Rossetti incorporates allusions to the 'garden' of the Song of Songs in her depiction of Dorothea who, having emerged triumphantly through her earthly trials, sings and plucks 'palm branches in the sheltered land' (line 15) of the Heavenly realms. The final three verses read,

"Is there a path to Heaven  
 "My heavy foot may tread;  
 "And will you show that way to go,  
 "That rose and lily bed?  
 "Which day of all these seven  
 "Will lighten my heart of lead,  
 "Will purge mine eyes and make me wise  
 "Alive or dead?"-

"There is a heavenward stair-  
 "Mount, strain upwards, strain and strain-  
 "Each step will crumble to your foot  
 "That never shall descend again.  
 "There grows a tree from ancient root,  
 "With healing leaves and twelvefold fruit,  
 "In musical Heaven air:  
 "Feast with me there."-

"I have a home on earth I cannot leave,  
 "I have a friend on earth I cannot grieve:  
 "Come down to me, I cannot mount to you."-  
 "Nay choose between us both,  
 "Choose as you are lief or loath:  
 "You cannot keep these things and have me too."- (lines 16- 36)

Dorothea's instruction to choose between a comfortable and satisfying, albeit fleeting, home on earth and the splendours of heaven which would involve a

---

<sup>23</sup> *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, 7 vols (1483; London, J.M. Dent, 1900-1931), vii, p. 47.

painful, but only temporary, mounting and a straining upwards, echoes Jesus' comment that 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' (Matthew 16:24) and reinforces Paul's encouragement to follow Christ and 'mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.' (Philippians 3:17). Rossetti's depiction of the 'sheltered land' (line 15) towards which the saints 'strain upwards' (line 25), and where 'There grows a tree from ancient root' (line 28), conflates the Garden of Eden with St. John's vision of New Jerusalem in Revelation. Genesis 2:9 relates how God made 'to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.' Envisioning these trees, John writes that 'on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations' (Revelation 22:2).

In "As cold waters," Rossetti reflects the shift from an Old Testament to a New Testament focus when she moves the emphasis from choice to desire. The speaker makes no mention of the 'home' that she 'cannot leave' ("Rivals," line 31). Rather, she demonstrates her active desire to enter the resting place of the saints when she asks,

"Is there a path to Heaven  
My stumbling foot may tread?  
And will you show that way to go,  
That bower and blossom bed?"  
"The path to Heaven is steep and straight  
And scorched, but end in shade of trees,  
Where yet a while we sing and wait  
And gather palm-branches." (lines 17-24)

By omitting the reference, made in "Rivals," to the 'tree from ancient root' (line 28), and instead alluding to the 'the path to Heaven' which 'ends in shades of

trees;’ Rossetti avoids confusing her depiction of the intermediate realm with the New Jerusalem for which they wait. More significantly, the transition from Dorothea’s words in “Rivals,” ‘I sing, I stand | “I pluck palm branches in the sheltered land’ (lines 14-15), to the lines of fellowship in ‘As cold waters,’ ‘we sing and wait | And gather palm-branches’ (lines 16-17), is indicative of Rossetti’s increasing concern to emphasise the interdependence between the Communion of the Saints and the individual’s communion with God. She suggests that it is this interdependence, alongside the incorporation of the individual into the Bride of Christ that makes the intermediate state of Hades one of rest, pertaining to a steady movement. Indeed, the ‘shade of trees’ (line 22) that she refers to can be aligned to Augustine’s figuration of the ascent to Heaven becoming easier as he, by ‘degrees’ allows himself to be ‘bourne,’ ‘inflamed,’ ‘kindled,’ and ‘carried upwards’ by his love (*Confessions*, xiii, 9.10, p. 282).

Throughout ‘New Jerusalem and its Citizens,’ by actively engaging with the injunction that Christians are to read the Psalms in ‘the light of Gospel perfection’ (*TF*, April 12; p. 69), Rossetti builds upon the depictions of the various degrees of the spiritual journey that she offers in “As cold waters” from ‘stumbling’ up the ‘steep and straight’ path (lines 18 and 21) to walking through the ‘shade of trees.’ Each believer must, she argues, embark on the path of suffering if they are to join the Communion of Saints. Indeed, in ‘Dear Angels and dear disembodied Saints’ (*CP*, p. 501), she recalls Paul’s epistles when she encourages her readers to imitate those who ‘rose and ran | When Christ, life-giver, roused them from their sleep | To rise and run and rest in Paradise’ (lines 12-14). It is her perception of her readers’ urgent need to hear this

encouragement that, I want to argue, serves as the impetus behind the momentum of *Verses* and distinguishes Rossetti as a ‘nursing mother’ (*FD*, p. 312).

## Chapter 5: Multiple Reflections: The ‘deep surface’ of Rossetti’s Sonnet Sequences

In his book, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence*, John Holmes notes that the dozens of sonnet sequences published in the 1870’s and 1880’s ‘were characterised, individually and collectively, by attempts to develop a poetry of selfhood.’<sup>1</sup> Considering their engagement with this ‘poetry of selfhood,’ this chapter examines the typological impulses exemplified in a comparative study of Rossetti’s 1856 sonnet, ‘In an Artist’s Studio’ (*CP*, p. 796), her 1881 sonnet sequences *Monna Innominata* (*CP*, p. 294-301) and *Later Life* (*CP*, p. 346-359), and the opening sequence of *Verses*, “Out of the Deep Have I Called unto Thee, O Lord” (*CP*, p. 389-396). I wish to suggest that all four work with the issue of namelessness, rely on biblical depictions of female beauty, and juxtapose surface reflection with inner depth as they explore the difficulties of finding and articulating an authentic trinitarian selfhood. It is my contention that as Rossetti moves towards representing this trinitarian selfhood as amorphous and fluid, she utilises the structure of the sonnet and the sonnet sequence to offer a typological re-visioning, rather than a direct critique, of the traditional Western model of a unified individual. Throughout the devotional sonnets that I investigate, Rossetti figures the self as clay, fire, and shadow, and purports that self-disintegration is not necessarily negative. Although she notes that the move away from the enlightenment representation of the individual as a single self contained entity is painful, threatening, and de-stabilizing, I argue that she conceives of it as primarily restorative in that the subject can, albeit ‘wan with

---

<sup>1</sup> John Holmes, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), p. vii.

waiting', be seen 'as she is' ('In an Artist's Studio,' lines 12-13) rather than as she fills the illusionary dream of the gazer.

In chapter two, I challenged the popular critical interpretation that Linda Peterson articulates when she suggests that, unlike her narrative poems which defy the traditional assumptions about women's art, Rossetti's devotional writings 'remain safely within the feminine sphere' defined by her brother's 1849 painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*.<sup>2</sup> In my analysis of the careful sequencing of the sonnets in "Out of the Deep," I continue to challenge this interpretation and argue that Rossetti's devotional poetry offers a space in which the traditional, domestic-based ideology of the 'feminine sphere' can be revised according to biblical models. By presenting her typological hermeneutics through the framework of the Petrarchan sonnet, I want to suggest that as she Christianises the poetic form of the roundel, Rossetti radically transforms a structure traditionally reserved for male amatory discourse. Following her observation that, through the Petrarchan sonnet, the male speaker 'predicates his identity on the absence of a female addressee,' Alison Chapman argues that 'when women poets write from *within the convention*, they are faced with its inexorable code that counsels them to silence' (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup> Whilst I agree that in her early sonnets her speakers are bound 'to silence;' I want to suggest that as she develops as a poet and as a Christian, Rossetti increasingly embraces her marginalised position and introduces the notion of a silence that empowers, thus transforming both the content and the structural properties of the sonnet form.

---

<sup>2</sup> Linda H. Peterson, 'Restoring the Book: The Typological Hermeneutics of Christina Rossetti and the PRB,' *Victorian Poetry*, 37 (1994), 209-231 (p. 210).

<sup>3</sup> Alison Chapman, 'Sonnet and Sonnet Sequence,' in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Antony H. Harrison (Malden: Mass: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 99-114 (p. 102).



Unlike her idiosyncratic deployment of the poetic structure of the roundel, Rossetti's move towards Christianising the sonnet can be seen in conjunction with her increasing engagement with the Tractarian theology of her male counterparts. Indeed, the 204 sonnets included in Isaac Williams' 1847 book, *The Altar*, enable her to position her 'poetry of selfhood' within the doctrines which characterised the theology of the Oxford Movement. In a letter she wrote to Dante Gabriel in 1881, Rossetti claims that for her, *The Altar* serves as a book of spiritual guidance. Following her acknowledgement of the 'relief' she finds in the practice of 'confession and absolution and spiritual counsel,' she echoes Williams' couplet, 'Tis like frail man to love to walk on high, But to be lowly is to be like God' (*Letters*, ii, p. 311, 2 December 1881).<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's passing reference to the marginal illustrations with which Rossetti adorned her copy of *The Altar*, a scholarly investigation has yet to be carried out which maps Rossetti's intellectual and emotional engagement with the text.<sup>5</sup> Building on Diane D'Amico's study of the role that John Keble's *The Christian Year* played in shaping her 'spiritual life and specifically her prayer making,' I work towards filling this gap in Rossetti scholarship by tracing the various ways in which her method of mapping her typological hermeneutics in and through her sonnet sequences was informed by the model offered in Williams' volume.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of Dolores Rosenblum's recognition that 'the groupings in *Verses* represent deliberate sequences'; "Out of the Deep," which consists of seventeen

<sup>4</sup> Isaac Williams, *The Altar; or, Meditations in Verse on the Great Christian Sacrifice* (London: Joseph Masters, 1849), Part xviii, sonnet 2, lines 11-12. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and indicated by the title *The Altar*.

<sup>5</sup> Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Diane D'Amico, 'Christina Rossetti's *Christian Year*: Comfort for 'the Weary Heart'', *Victorian Newsletter*, 72 (1987), 36-42 (p. 41).

sonnets and develops certain themes and imagery has yet to be considered critically and at length as a coherent whole and incorporated into a study of Rossetti's sonnet sequences.<sup>7</sup> By countering this neglect and by working with the trope of the mirror and the reflection, this chapter demonstrates how, in the sonnets that constitute "Out of the Deep," Rossetti creates meaning through careful titling and arrangement and engages with her earlier sonnets, infusing them with typological significance. According to Holmes, in *The House of Life*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti

rejects strict linearity for a form which finds structural cohesion in recurrent patterns of symbolism, in the tension between one sonnet and another, and between one group of sonnets and another, and in the gradual and unostentatious revolving of the sequence through a set of themes and ideas.

This reshaping of the form, he argues, creates in readers a 'willingness to seek interpretations and associations for themselves rather than being clearly led between them,' and invites them to 'enter into a process of self-exploration' (Holmes, p. 24). Considering that the form of the sonnet sequence pertains to a model of exegetical typology in that it is shaped as it revolves 'through a set of themes and ideas,' leading the reader to create meaning from correspondences; I suggest that by using it, Rossetti is not necessarily imitating her brother but is, alongside Williams, emphasising the centrality of the method of hermeneutics used by Patristic Fathers. Furthermore, developing Dinah Roe's suggestion that in *Monna Innominata*, by quoting the lines and cantos of Dante Alighieri's *Purgatorio* and Francesco Petrarch's *Canzoniere* out of order, the entire sequence enacts a challenge to chronological significance, I speak of Rossetti's

---

<sup>7</sup> Dolores Rosenblum, 'Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence,' in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 132-156 (p. 154).

utilisation of the sonnet sequence to map the spiritual and emotional, rather than sequential, journey of the soul.<sup>8</sup>

In *The Altar*, Williams heads each of his sonnets with an epigraph from the Bible. Although he structures the thirty-four sections of his volume around the chronological sequence of events which mark the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit, these epigraphs are not in any particular sequential order but rather exist to illustrate his understanding of the unity of Scripture and the certainty that the entire Bible points to the Incarnation. In “Out of the Deep,” rather than using epigraphs, Rossetti reinforces her belief in the unity of Scripture by interweaving various biblical quotes into the sonnets themselves. Added to this, as she creates an in-between space of transformative mirror reflections in individual sonnets through her deployment of the enclosed order and her use of chiasmic structures, she simultaneously develops a similar interpretative space between the quotes and the phrases that recur throughout each sequence and, on a larger scale, between the sequences themselves.

Moving away from the notion of ‘textual subjectivity’ that Sue Zemka suggests characterises the writings of Thomas De Quincey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the Romantic tendency which Mary Jacobus argues represents identity as an effect and register of reading; I want to suggest that, throughout her sonnets, Rossetti represents identity as the effect of the typological practice of *interpreting* correspondences between the Bible, the historical event, the contemporary circumstance, and the larger corpus of her work.<sup>9</sup> As I will

---

<sup>8</sup> Dinah Roe, *Christina Rossetti's Faithful Imagination: The Devotional Poetry and Prose* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Sue Zemka, *The Bible, Christology, and Literary Authority in Early Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 21; Mary Jacobus, ‘The Art of Managing Book: Romantic Prose and the Writing of the

demonstrate, it is this space of interpretative reflection that forms the basis of Rossetti's idiosyncratic 'poetry of selfhood.'

**i. 'Not as she is, but as she fills his dream': Christina Rossetti and the Pre- Raphaelite Epipsyche**

In 1860, Rossetti wrote a short story entitled 'Case 2, Folio Q.' According to her brother William Michael, it dealt with 'some supernatural matter—I think, a man whose doom it was not to get reflected in a looking glass (a sort of alternative form, so far, of *Peter Schlemihl*).'<sup>10</sup> A year after offering the story to *Cornhill Magazine*, she wrote to Alexander Macmillan claiming the tale had 'become such a subject of annoyance to me, that I burned it' (*Letters*, i, p. 143; 12 February 1861). In spite of her dissatisfaction, Rossetti continued to use the trope of the looking glass to discuss the conditions of selfhood and identity and to repeatedly suggest that the ostensible surface of the mirror image must be cast aside in the process of a subject's self recovery. This ostensible surface can be seen as the imprisoning 'I' which, as I argued in the previous chapter, serves as a barrier which prevents the individual from reaching an understanding of her trinitarian personhood. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar speak of the gothic properties of the mirror image for the female when they compare it to a 'glass coffin' and a 'sort of chamber.' They write that 'to be caught and trapped in a

---

Past,' in *Romanticism and Language*, ed. Arden Reed (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 215-246 (p. 216).

<sup>10</sup> *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir by William Michael Rossetti*. ed. by William Michael Rossetti, 2 vols. (Ellis & Elvey, London: 1895), ii, p. 162; January 1861.

mirror is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self.’<sup>11</sup>

In her 1851 poem, ‘A Royal Princess’ (*CP*, p. 143-6), Rossetti articulates the futility of looking to one’s own image in the search for a viable personhood. She imagines the mirrors that surround her protagonist as a kind of ‘glass coffin’ in that they imprison her spirit as they reveal an illusionary reflection of wholeness. She has her princess claim,

All my walls are lost in mirrors, whereupon I trace  
Self to right hand, self to left hand, self in every place,  
Self-same solitary figure, self-same seeking face. (lines 10-12)

The superficial and flat images of herself that she perceives around her as she observes the world from her ‘ivory throne’ (line 14) force her to see herself as hollow and without any interiority. Indeed, the ‘place’ (line 11) wherein she seeks a viable self-identity can be read as an anticipation of the ‘misty gusty place’ of Rossetti’s later poem, ‘A Castle-Builders World’ (*CP*, p. 522, line 2). Here, rather than ‘Living men and women,’ only ‘masks in flocks and shoals’ and ‘Shades of bodies without souls’ can be found (lines 5,6,10). In ‘A Royal Princess,’ it is not until the protagonist leaves the imprisoning chamber in her own ‘castle,’ breaks through her illusive mirrors, and offers all she has in order to buy bread for the people of her country that she is able to dispose of the masks she wears as a ‘lofty princess’ (line 19) and ‘rend bare’ (line 106) her heart to reveal her soul.

Following her reading of Alfred Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shallot,’ in terms of the Pre-Raphaelite practice of reframing fictional women in paintings,

---

<sup>11</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 43, 340, 37.

Helena Michie suggests that since a frame or mirror ‘can be protective as well as confining, its shattering can be a terrifying and confusing experience for the “model” as well as for the artist.’<sup>12</sup> In *The Altar*, Williams hints at the threatening outcome of breaking out from the ‘protective as well as confining’ mirror that the world offers when he describes the spiritual climb of the believer. He asks, ‘Must we withdraw from kindred and from friends | To know that mystery which thought transcends’ (i.5, lines. 2-3). Following the pattern set by *The Altar*, a spiritual dimension can be typologically inflected onto the redemptive action of Rossetti’s princess when it is understood in terms of the notion of ‘protective’ and ‘confining’ reflections and considered alongside the typological inflections presented throughout *Verses*.

Warning that a locust plague will sweep through Judah and herald the coming of ‘the great and terrible day of the LORD,’ the Old Testament prophet Joel instructs his listeners, ‘*rend* your heart, and not your garments, and *turn* unto the LORD your God’ (emphasis mine, Joel 2:31, 13). In *The Altar*, Williams repeatedly describes the acts of ‘rend[ing]’ and ‘turn[ing]’ in typological terms. In his exploration of the agonies Christ suffered in Garden of Gethsemane, he indicates that the process of rending one’s heart and turning to God follows the pattern of Christ when he declares that ‘where Thy Flesh is rent, the Rock is cleft’ (ii.6, line 7). In her 1862 poem, ‘Good Friday,’ Rossetti explores the typological conflation of flesh being ‘rent’ at the crucifixion and the rock in Horeb being ‘cleft’ (Exodus 17:16) when she asks that Christ, being ‘Greater than Moses,’ might ‘turn and look once more | And smite a rock’ (*CP*, p. 180-1, lines 15-16). In *Annus Domini*, she highlights the significance of rending and

---

<sup>12</sup> Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 108.

smiting the earthly when she recommends ‘rend[ing] our hearts with the humble cry of the Publican’ (*AD*, prayer no. 77). In sonnet 11 of *Monna Innominata*, she combines the urgency of Joel’s message with this call to be ‘humble’ when she has her speaker declare that with her ‘heart of love laid bare,’ she will forgo her lover so she can successfully negotiate the ‘passage’ to the ‘gate of death’ (lines 9, 12). Following this, by moving away from a concern with the individual and towards a concern with communal identity, the speaker of *Later Life* expresses the importance of persevering on the spiritual journey and recognises that, in order that they reach Heaven; believers must ‘Rend hearts and rend not garments’ for their ‘sins’ and ‘Gird sackcloth not on body but on soul’ (sonnet 2, lines 1-2). In addition to depicting the rending of the ‘garment’ that conceals the subject behind a mask of charms and superficiality, by emphasising a concern with the ‘hearts’ and the ‘soul[s]’ of individuals, Rossetti highlights the importance of moving beyond revelation and towards *participation* in the crucifixion of Christ.

Throughout her poetry, Rossetti not only indicates the applicability of Joel’s instruction for the contemporary woman but also suggests that possibility of liberation open to her. Indeed, it is only after rending bare her heart and forgoing all illusion that her princess can ‘show | The lesson I have learned, which is death, is life, to know’ (‘A Royal Princess,’ lines 106-7). This lesson, ‘if I perish [...] in the name of God I go’ (line 108), renders a concern with maintaining one’s individual identity futile and anticipates Rossetti’s later recognition, repeatedly expressed in the sonnets of “Out of Deep,” that without God the individual is merely ‘A fading leaf, a spark upon the wane’ (‘Lord, grant me grace to love Thee in my pain,’ line 5, *CP*, p. 395).

Written only five years after 'A Royal Princess,' 'In an Artist's Studio' reflects the dynamics between interior and exterior identity and concerns itself with the nature of authentic selfhood beyond the mirror's reflection.

One face looks out from all his canvasses,  
 One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;  
 We found her hidden just behind those screens,  
 That mirror gave back all her loveliness.  
 A queen in opal or in ruby dress,  
 A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,  
 A saint, an angel; every canvas means  
 The same one meaning, neither more nor less.  
 He feeds upon her face by day and night,  
 And she with true kind eyes looks back on him  
 Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:  
 Not wan with waiting not with sorrow dim;  
 Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;  
 Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

Like the mirrors which surround the 'self-same solitary figure' of Rossetti's princess ('A Royal Princess,' line 12), the 'screens' and the 'mirror' in the studio ('In an Artist's Studio,' lines 3, 4) fit Michie's description of reflections that are 'protective as well as confining' in that they give the artist a false sense of the model's identity. Perhaps painted with imaginary scenes they, like the princess' chamber, isolate her from the reality of the outside world and cast her as a superfluous other who is so far removed from the humanity of the artist that she cannot threaten or compromise his sense of autonomous identity. By drawing attention to her 'one face' and her 'selfsame figure' (lines 1-2) Rossetti reinforces the idea that the women, as seen through men's eyes, do not exist as individuals but rather live as 'Shades of bodies without souls' ('A Castle-Builder's Word,' line 10).

In her discussion of reading women, Mary Jacobus suggests that

In constituting woman as our object when we read, we not only read in gender, but constitute ourselves as readers. The stabilising, specular



image of women in the text makes reading possible by assuring us that we have women's faces too.<sup>13</sup>

Considered in terms of 'In an Artist's Studio', Jacobus' empathetic alignment of the reader with the 'stabilising' and 'specular' presence of the model opposes traditional interpretations of the sonnet in which the act of reading or interpretation is aligned to the vision of the gazer. At first glance, Rossetti appears to conflate the reader with the 'We' who 'found her hidden just behind those screens' (line 3). Differentiated from the 'He' who 'feeds upon her face by day and night' (line 9) and the 'she' who 'with true kind eyes looks back on him' (line 10), the only attribute of this 'We' is its vision. However, when positioned alongside Rossetti's later poetry, it is the 'One face' (line 1) of the model that can be seen as most representative of her imagined reader.

In "Out of the Deep," working with the biblical precept that 'we all, with *open face* beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord' (emphasis mine, 2 Corinthians 3:18), Rossetti deploys the structure of the sonnet to map the alteration of the individual as she finds true identity in the 'image' of God. Transforming the 'true kind eyes' (line 10) with which the model looks to the artist, into the 'watchful hearts and eyes' ('Lord, to Thine own grant watchful hearts and eyes,' *CP*, p. 451) of the believer, she highlights the chasm between the love of man and the love of God. In 'In an Artist's Studio' by using, as her volta, the vampiric description of the artist feeding upon the face of his model (line 9), she emphasises the destruction initiated by his voyeuristic and cruel desires. In 'Lord, to Thine own grant watchful hearts and eyes,' by depicting the

---

<sup>13</sup> Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 3-24 (p. 4).

saints as ‘So lit by love that Christ shines manifest | Transfiguring their aspects to His own’ (lines 13-14) she, like Williams, alludes to the humility she believes necessary for unmitigated reflection and the empowerment she recognises arising from turning to God with an open face. Indeed, whilst the self-abasement of the ‘Sweet souls’ (line 9) means that Christ is able to ‘shine’ through them (line 13), the self-abasement of the artist’s model means that she is no longer as she was when ‘hope shone bright’ (line 13) but instead, is made ‘wan with waiting’ and ‘dim’ with sorrow’ (line 12).

In Rossetti’s earlier poetical translation, ‘Imitated from the Arpa Evangelica: Page 121’ (*CP*, p. 864-866), Christ is described as ‘Love’s Pelican’, transforming St. John when he reclined his head on his breast (lines 3-4) and ‘filling’ each believer by ‘pouring forth’ his ‘Divinehood’ (lines 15-16). According to medieval legend, the long-necked pelican wounded its own breast to feed its young on its blood. When the exegetical interpretation of this legend is considered in conjunction with ‘In an Artist’s Studio,’ the image of the artist ‘feeding’ upon the face of his model can be interpreted as indicative of the speaker of Dante Gabriel’s *The House of Life* who inverts Christian doctrine by worshipping and spiritualizing the female body and making the ‘face’ of his model a ‘shrine.’<sup>14</sup>

U.C. Knoepfelmacher speaks of how Rossetti expresses her resistance to the spiritualization of the female body in ‘In an Artist’s Studio’ when he suggests that,

Whether the reference is to Elizabeth Siddal, whose self-same face and figure are so prominently displayed in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s canvases

---

<sup>14</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The House of Life*, Sonnet x, ‘The Portrait,’ line 12, in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 127-158 (p. 132).

of the 1850's and 1860's, or whether the sonnet harks back to Christina Rossetti's own repeated experiences as her brother's passive model, it clearly constitutes an acerbic commentary on the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics of immanence.<sup>15</sup>

The notion that Rossetti wrote her sonnet as an 'acerbic commentary' on, or as a response to, the aesthetics of the Pre-Raphaelites is one which is commonly acknowledged in contemporary criticism. However if, as Catherine Maxwell suggests, the metaphors of reflection as identity and the feminisation of the Victorian male poet or artist originate with mythic images and figures and have been carried through seminal literary works from Plato to John Milton and Percy Bysshe Shelley, Rossetti's counter-cultural conception of the artist's model in her sonnet provides significantly more than merely a commentary on her contemporaries in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.<sup>16</sup> Rather, it provides a critique of the stereotypical male gaze from the middle ages onwards. Furthermore, as I have indicated, by considering 'In an Artist's Studio' in the framework of Rossetti's later devotional sonnets, the critique offered can be seen as one which challenges the very roots of constructions of selfhood for both male artist and female model.

In contemplating the idea of the beautiful woman as the 'mirror' which reflects back to man his feminized self, Barrie Bullen suggests that one is reminded of Shelley's notion of the 'antitype' or 'epipsyche' whereby the female other reflects back and fulfils the latent desire of the male in a state of symmetry.<sup>17</sup> In his essay, 'On Love', Shelley describes 'Love' as the wish that 'the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's' and that

---

<sup>15</sup> U.C Knoepfelmacher, 'Avenging Alice: Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll,' *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 41 (1986) 299-328 (p. 300).

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Barrie Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 127.

‘another’s nerves should vibrate to our own.’ Much like the canvasses that surround the artist reflecting the ‘one face’ upon which he feeds, Shelley speaks of the epipsyche as a ‘mirror’ - a two dimensional object that can never reflect the true self and argues that

We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed; a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness; a soul within our own soul that describes a circle around a proper paradise, which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap.

For Shelley, ‘Love’ is the discovery in another of ‘our own’ [male] sense of selfhood. He argues that it is this ‘Love’ that enables man to live and writes that, ‘So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.’<sup>18</sup>

Shelley’s influence can be seen in Thomas Woolner’s seminal plaster statuette of a woman which he exhibited in 1856, the same year as Rossetti composed ‘In an Artist’s Studio’. Entitled ‘Love’, Jane Thomas claims that Woolner’s statuette is a good example of the Pre-Raphaelite preoccupation of giving ‘concrete embodiment’ to ‘mysterious and elusive states of the mind’ and writes of how, when the statuette was exhibited, Dante Gabriel highlighted the way in which Woolner had chosen to represent love by the figure of a woman rather than through the image of cupid.<sup>19</sup> A literal rendering of this conception can be evidenced in his short story, ‘Hand and Soul.’ In this, he articulates the idea of giving ‘concrete embodiment’ to the ‘Love’ that Shelley speaks of. First

<sup>18</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘On Love’ (1828), in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 631-2 (p. 632).

<sup>19</sup> Jane Thomas, ‘Introduction’, in Thomas Hardy, *The Well Beloved with The Pursuit of the Well Beloved* (1892; Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), p. xxi.

published in the 1850 Pre-Raphaelite periodical, *The Germ*, 'Hand and Soul' tells the story of Chiaro, a young painter in the thirteenth century who longed for a visible embodiment of his thoughts. In an enlightening dream Chiaro sees a vision of a woman in his room whose hair he recognizes as 'the golden veil through which he beheld his dreams.' She tells him that she is an image of 'thine own soul within thee.' After encouraging him in faith, she instructs, 'take now thine Art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know me: weak as I am, and in the weeds of this time [...] Do this; so shall thy soul stand before thee always, and perplex thee no more.'<sup>20</sup> In his consideration of Dante Gabriel's work of the 1850's and 60's, Bullen suggests that he was suffering from what can be described as the 'Pygmalion syndrome' which involves 'the creative drive of the male who forms the female 'other' in the image of his ideal, but as a result sets up an unstable and sometimes disturbing emotional balance between creating subjects and created object' (p. 110-1). Articulated through the artist in 'In an Artist's Studio,' who cannot recognize the model 'as she is' but only 'as she fills his dream' (lines 13-14), Bullen suggests that the Pygmalion artist forms an 'image of undifferentiated femininity, compliantly reciprocal, a prophylactic against the threat of self-disintegration' (ibid, p. 126-7).

In her discussion of Elizabeth Siddal's 1853 illustration, 'The Lady of Shallot,' Elizabeth Prettejohn highlights the significance of the inclusion of a crucifix. She suggests that it can be understood to parallel the Lady's self-sacrifice with Christ's.<sup>21</sup> Whilst the poetry that she composed in the 1850's can be aligned to Siddal's drawing in view of its ironic stance towards the vampiric

---

<sup>20</sup> *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 'Hand and Soul' (1850), in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*, pp. 309-318 (p. 314).

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), p. 227.

male artist I want to suggest that, in her later writings, Rossetti develops a more positive and transformative standpoint from which to consider the conflation of the crucified Christ and the passive female model. This standpoint is exemplified in the chiasmic model that David A. Shaw identifies in his book, *Victorians and Mystery: Crises of Representation*. Here, he suggests that ‘the heroic use of chiasmus’ is the ‘signature’ of Rossetti’s faith and argues that

The tripe of crossing over allows Rossetti to say al that she means. It helps her to cross the divide between life and death, knowledge and ignorance, in an ironic double movement that is sanctioned ultimately by the perfect chiasmus of the Cross.<sup>22</sup>

Following this model of interpretation, he speaks of the ‘emphatic merging of persons’ in Rossetti’s poem ‘A heavy heart’ (*CP*, p. 513). He claims that here, ‘the mirroring effect of the midline caesura and the chiasmus of ‘me loving... loving me’ [line 15] are devices of a poet who knows how to use the chiasmus of the Cross and who loves to handle varied grammatical elements, turning them over with fond and exact scrutiny’ (Shaw, p. 259). In sonnet 4 of *Monna Innominata*, Rossetti has her speaker suggest that ‘one is both and both are one in love’ (line 11). I want to argue that this focus on, what Shaw terms, the ‘emphatic merging’ of the lovers acts as a typological indication of the spiritual chiasmus that is to come. In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti explores the notion of the perfect chiasmus and imbues the silenced, love-forsaken, and suffering women of her earlier poems with spiritual strength. She speaks of the process of becoming one with Christ in her claim that ‘The acts and crosses of each day and every day, your acts and crosses and my own, are capable of reappearing in that achieved glory’ (p. 437). Moving this explication of the spiritual chiasmus

---

<sup>22</sup> David A. Shaw, *Victorians and Mystery: Crises of Representation* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 252.

forwards, she utilises various poetic structures to highlight the imbibing relationship with God that, she believes, gives meaning to the life of an individual.

In chapter two, I used Teresa Brennan's theory of energetic affects to discuss Rossetti's figuration of the interlocking relationships that exist between individuals, and between Christ and believers. Brennan suggests that 'the identity founded in one's self-image is simultaneously a spatial construction' in that it is 'deflected back to the self from [...] one's ideal image.'<sup>23</sup> Rather than considering this 'spatial construction' in terms of Shelley's notion of the one-dimensional epipsyche, by interpreting it within a biblical framework, I suggested that it can be understood to pertain to the experience of the believer as she is progressively transformed into a part of the bride of Christ by the Holy Spirit through the reading of the Scriptures and the self-control of the gaze. In a discussion of what she terms 'locational feminism,' Susan Stanford Freidman suggests moving away from the conventional association of space with stasis and towards a focus on the encounter that 'fosters a focus on narrative kinesis' and 'spatial movement.'<sup>24</sup> Figuring Brennan's theory of the 'spatial construction' of identity in the light of Freidman's notions of 'spatial movement,' I want to suggest that Rossetti utilises the sonnet structure to articulate notions of spiritual growth and progressive movement through the process of mirroring the Divine and is thus able offer a model of selfhood that is fully reciprocal but yet not the shallow, 'undifferentiated' image that Bullen speaks of.

---

<sup>23</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 108-9.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: feminism and the cultural geographies of encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 139.

In 1892, Rossetti composed 'Lord, to Thine own grant watchful hearts and eyes' (*FD*, p. 439). Originally included as part of her commentary on the first clause of Revelation 19:9, 'And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the Marriage Supper of the Lamb,' the sonnet can be read so as to emphasise the importance of retaining 'watchful hearts and eyes' and 'Hearts strung to prayer' (lines 1-2) in order that the believer can secure a place at the promised 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb.' In 1893, by incorporating the sonnet into *Verses* and giving it the title of 'Vigil of St Bartholomew' (*CP*, p. 451), Roe suggests that Rossetti 'explicitly makes the poem relevant both to men and women, and further suggests that Bartholomew acted after the example of the wise virgins, emulating their feminine virtues of calm and patient vigilance' (Roe, p. 206). Rather than using the poem to posit a specific feminist agenda, I want to argue that Rossetti uses it both to highlight the assimilation of believers within the communion of 'Sweet souls' (line 9) and to reflect on the journey up the 'track to Paradise' (line 8).

Lord, to Thine own grant watchful hearts and eyes;  
 Hearts strung to prayer, awake whilst eyelids sleep;  
 Eyes patient till the end to watch and weep.  
 So will sleep nourish power to wake and rise  
 With Virgins who keep vigil and are wise,  
 To sow among all sowers who shall reap,  
 From out man's deep to call Thy vaster deep,  
 And tread the uphill track to Paradise.  
 Sweet souls! so patient that they make no moan,  
 So calm on journey that seem at rest,  
 So rapt in prayer that half they dwell in heaven  
 Thankful for all withheld and all things given;  
 So lit by love that Christ shines manifest  
 Transfiguring their aspects to His own.

Along with the other poems in the sequence, this sonnet highlights Rossetti's engagement with St. Augustine's notion that as the believer's relationship with God deepens and the boundaries between the self and the divine are rendered



more and more fluid, the easier the journey to Paradise becomes. The use of internal repetition and rhyme throughout the octave creates a tripping beat which is suggestive of the ease of the ‘uphill track’ for the believer who, learning through prayer to ‘dwell in heaven,’ is in the process of assimilating his identity with Christ’s (lines 8, 11). With this in mind, the use of the term ‘man’ (line 7) can be seen to pertain to the notion of the individual growing to exist as a reflection of the title that the gospel writers claim Jesus repeatedly gave himself, ‘the Son of man.’

It is significant to note that, corresponding to the chiasmic structure of the abccba rhyme scheme, each line in the first tercet is mirrored by an analogous line in the second. At the centre, the notion that the believers ‘half dwell in heaven’ (line 11) is accounted for by their ‘thankful[ness]’ (line 12). Added to this, considering her repeated deployment of the Augustinian metaphor of the spiritual fire throughout *Verses* to indicate the passion and the upward movement of the soul as it nears inclusion in the conflagration that is Heaven, the ‘journey’ alluded to in the tenth line wherein the believer seems ‘at rest’ corresponds to the image of being ‘lit by love’ in the thirteenth. Most significantly however, the final line exemplifies the process of transformation through which ‘the identity founded in one’s self-image is [...] deflected back to the self from [...] one’s ideal image’ (Brennan, see above). By rooting her ‘ideal image’ in the biblical figures of the wise virgins, and the sowers (lines 5-6), Rossetti has her speaker draw attention to her conviction that the Bible itself acts as a mirror which reflects back to the individual an authentic vision of personhood. For the Victorian male poet, Maxwell suggests that the presence of the epipsychic beloved ‘would ideally be that of a silent affirmation, the mute auditor of her

lover's address, reflecting his admiring narcissistic gaze.'<sup>25</sup> In 'Lord, to Thine own grant watchful hearts and eyes' however, by suggesting that the silence of the 'Sweet souls' pertains to their patience (line 9), Rossetti transforms the image of the helpless epipsychic female into a monument of spiritual perseverance and develops the eschatological perspective voiced in the seventh sonnet of "Out of the Deep," that 'Death is not death [...] | Nor silence silence' ('It is not death, O Christ, to die for Thee', *CP*, p. 392, lines 9-10).

As Rossetti uses the structure of the sonnet to articulate the transformative process of reflection for a kinetic self, so too does she map her 'poetry of selfhood' onto the structure of the sonnet sequence and the typological space between the sequences where the reader is given space for exegetical reflections. In both *Monna Innominata* and *Later Life*, Rossetti engages with the fear of self-disintegration that is expressed in the writings of Shelley and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Subsequently, in "Out of the Deep," she speaks of Christ's willing self-sacrifice and concludes that individual self-disintegration is a *necessary* condition for incorporation into the Communion of Saints. She challenges Shelley's notion that 'Love' is the discovery of a sense of selfhood reflected in another when she presents the Augustinian idea that each believer can find an authentic reflection of divine Love by looking within him or herself. As Williams speaks of the depths of 'mine own secret soul' as 'that cavern deep | Whence issue streams of life' (*The Altar*, i.6, lines 79-80), in the second sonnet of the sequence, 'Seven vials hold Thy wrath' (*CP*, p. 389-90) Rossetti suggests that 'Love' is derived solely from God and forms the 'mould' and source of each being (line 5).

---

<sup>25</sup> Catherine Maxwell, 'Engendering Vision in the Victorian Male Poet', in *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. by Barrie Bullen (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 73-103 (p. 86).

In chapters two and three, I considered Rossetti's depiction of the painful transformation that, she believes, each believer must undergo in order that she fashion herself into a vessel for Christ's love. This consideration is significant in understanding the ontological dimension behind the sestet of the second sonnet of *Later Life*:

Let us today while it is called today  
Set out, if utmost speed may yet avail-  
The shadows lengthen and the light grows pale:  
For who thro' darkness and the shadow of death,  
Darkness that may be felt, shall find a way,  
Blind-eyed, deaf-eared, and choked with failing breath?

In addition to sharing its position as the second sonnet in a sequence and its unconventional abbcac rhyme scheme, the sestet of 'Seven vials' also depicts the spiritual journey to self-understanding:

Lord give us grace to tremble with that dove  
Which Ark-bound winged its solitary way  
And overpast the Deluge in a day,  
Whom Noah's hand pulled in and comforted:  
For we who much more hang upon Thy Love  
Behold its shadow in the deed he did.

By reading both sonnets as reflections of one another in consequence of their shared structural properties, the intricacies of Rossetti's typological investigations are brought to the fore. For instance, conflating the depiction of the 'shadows' which 'lengthen' (*Later Life*, sonnet 2, line 11) with the 'shadow' of the crucifixion ('Seven vials,' line 14) means converting the fear and confusion of the 'blind-eyed, and deaf-eared' (line 14) travellers of the earlier sonnet into the comfort provided by the glimpse of the incarnation in the second and imbibing the travellers with the peace of the dove.

Genesis 8:9 narrates the journey of the dove which returned to Noah and his Ark: 'But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned

unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he [Noah] put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.’ In her unpublished notes on Genesis, Rossetti highlights the fact that the dove ‘is not shut out, but pulled in’ (underlining in the original).<sup>26</sup> Here, her emphasis on the word ‘pulled’ corresponds to the motion exemplified in the centre of the sestet of ‘Seven Vials,’ of being ‘pulled in and comforted’ (line 12). By figuring herself as the dove and by typologically interpreting Noah’s hand as Christ’s arms stretched out on the cross, the speaker of the sonnet is able to express the hope that the speaker of *Later Life* struggles to comprehend. Added to this, the imagery of the thirteenth line of both sonnets illustrates the transformative change that the acquisition of spiritual hope brings. In *Later Life*, a hope is voiced that through the ‘Darkness that may be felt,’ the speaker ‘shall find a way.’ This hope anticipates the movement exemplified in sonnet 10, when the speaker recognises that ‘As doves fly to their windows, love’s own bird | Contended and desirous to the nest’ (lines 13-14).

Moving beyond the stage of typological interpretation exemplified throughout *Later Life*, in ‘Seven Vials’, the speaker demonstrates her comprehension of the ultimate goal when she participates in the crucifixion. Read alongside the allusion of the ‘shadow’ of ‘the deed he did’, the utilisation of the image of ‘hang[ing] upon Thy Love’ alludes to a true hope in Christ that far surpasses the comfort that Noah was able to offer the dove in his Ark (lines 14,13). By articulating the notion that the recognition of this hope can only be attained through identification with Christ in the perfect chiasmus of the Cross,

---

<sup>26</sup> Christina Rossetti, ‘unpublished notes on Genesis,’ in Lynda Palazzo, ‘The Prose Works of Christina Rossetti’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Durham, 1992), Appendix A.

the sonnet emphasises both the cost of discipleship and the spiritual nature of, what Shaw terms, ‘emphatic merging.’ In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti declares that ‘The Cross is the nucleus of heaven’ before suggesting that ‘Angles inward, the cross of probation: angles outward, the square of perfection’ (p. 504-5). By associating the despair of living in a period of ‘probation’ with the pain of crucifixion, and by linking the joy of heavenly ‘perfection’ with the joy self-oblation brings, she highlights the both the cost and the urgency of identifying oneself with the crucified Christ.

In the introduction to *Medieval Preachers and Medieval Preaching*, John Mason Neale writes of how Guarric of Igniac articulates the process of participating in the crucifixion and completely identifying oneself with Christ:

“The Lord,” he says, “thus speaks by His prophet, My people shall hang on My return. It is well and properly said; *shall hang*, as it were, between heaven and earth. They are neither able to ascend to heavenly things, nor willing to descend to earth. The common proverb tells us, ‘It is ill waiting while one is hanging.’ But I say, it is well waiting while one is so hanging. My soul chooses this suspension of its own free will, and only desires to hang on such a cross till it shall depart from the body.” (italics in the original)<sup>27</sup>

In chapter four, I suggested that, throughout her late devotional poetry and prose, Rossetti elides the movement through time with the movement through space. By following Guarric of Igniac’s decision to imitate Christ and ‘hang’ on the cross that divides heaven and earth, Rossetti has her speakers articulate the moment of suspension where the saints ‘hang upon Thy Love’ (‘Seven Vials, line 13) as they await the second coming. In addition to conflating themselves with Christ, through the process of ‘hang[ing]’ upon’ God, she emphasises the transformation

---

<sup>27</sup> John Mason Neale, *Medieval Preachers and Medieval Preaching: A series of extracts, translated from the sermons of the middle ages* (London: J. & C. Mozley, 1856), p. xlix.

they undergo as their perspective is shifted from the worldly to the divine and the spatial and temporal boundaries that divide them from heaven are collapsed.

In my discussion of ‘Vigil of St. Bartholomew,’ I spoke of the sestet’s chiasmic structure. Although the rhyme scheme of ‘Seven vials’ does not fit the model of this earlier poem, I want to suggest that the imagery deployed corresponds to a similar chiasmic pattern. Indeed, just as the ‘grace’ spoken of in the ninth line finds its correlative in the ‘shadow’ of the fourteenth, the depiction of the dove that ‘winged its solitary way’ to the ark in the tenth line, finds its typological fulfilment in the believer who ‘hang[s] upon’ God’s love in the thirteenth. Rossetti suggests that it is by simultaneously stretching out one’s arms to ‘wing [...] overpast’ (lines 10, 11) the temptations of the world and to indicate self-sacrifice that the believer most resembles God who stretches out his arms to both pull in and comfort the faithful (line 12) and Christ who stretches out his arms as he submits himself to self-oblation. This suggestion follows the movement of *The Altar* where, following his contention that by drinking ‘The Cup of Agony’ (*The Altar*, title iii), Williams recalls how Christ was empowered to cover believers with protection ‘beneath those sheltering wings’ (iii.3, line 1). He suggests that those who ‘gaze upon the Cross’ are able to strive ‘upward [...] Taking their wing from thence and power of flight | To Heaven’ (xxi.5, lines 6-8). By offering her own nuances to Williams’ theology and by conflating the notions of winging, pulling, and hanging, Rossetti emphasises that the process of ‘hang[ing] upon’ the love of God demands the *willingness* of the believer to remain in a state of suspension as she prepares to receive divine grace.

ii. **Beyond the looking glass: Hermeneutical understandings of true feminine attractiveness**

In the first sonnet of *Monna Innominata*, the speaker laments, 'My hope hangs waning, waxing, like a moon.' (line 11). Her hope is moon-like precisely because it remains in suspension in that it relies on a lover for illumination. This lover is the 'one man' whose presence makes meeting 'heavenly' and whose positive judgments make life 'sweet' (lines 7, 12, 14). Throughout *Verses*, by using the imagery of the moon to describe the believer, Rossetti negates the distinctions between her devotional and non- devotional poetry and exemplifies the typological interpretative strategy that Mary Arseneau and Jan Marsh term *intratextuality*, whereby her earlier poems find their typological fulfilment in her later.<sup>28</sup> For instance, in the first sonnet of "Out of the Deep," 'Alone Lord God, in Whom our trust and peace' (*CP*, p. 389), she can be seen to offer a reply to the speaker of *Monna Innominata* when she likens the 'pleasures that begin and cease' with the 'moon which wanes' and the 'seasons which decrease' (lines 4-5). Just as the speaker of 'A Better Resurrection' declares that her 'life is in the falling leaf' (line 7), it is *in* the waning moon and the decreasing seasons that the speaker of 'Alone Lord God' is able to find a place within 'love's self-feeding fire' (line 14). Considered alongside her depiction, in *Monna Innominata*, of a 'hope' that 'hangs,' Rossetti's understanding of the self as a moon which exists solely to reflect the Son of God transforms the negative inflections associated with the image and exemplifies the process whereby the individual is transformed into a 'moon which receives' the Son's blessings (*FD*, p. 94).

---

<sup>28</sup> Mary Arseneau and Jan Marsh, 'Intertextuality and Intratextuality: The Full Text of Christina Rossetti's "Harmony on First Corinthians XIII" Rediscovered,' *Victorian Newsletter* (1995), 17-26 (p. 21).

In her discussion of Rossetti's feminist poetics, Margaret Homans categorises *Monna Innominata* as Rossetti's 'self-consciously anti-Petrarchan sonnet sequence.'<sup>29</sup> Following this, in her book, *Desire and Gender in the Sonnet Tradition*, Natasha Distiller notes the restrictions Rossetti encountered through her engagement with Petrarchism. She argues that

By entering Petrarchism from within its constituting rules, Rossetti ensures that her poet's desire will be safely honourable, that is, it is from the beginning a never-to-be-met need. By rechanneling her desire into the love of God she authorises the exploration of the disappointing nature of earthly love. Rossetti's spiritual framing of an already doomed love enables the containment of a desire whose achievement is always deferred.<sup>30</sup>

Although, as I have indicated, *Monna Innominata* can be read through a notion of 'rechanneling' and interpreted in the framework of 'the love of God,' Distiller's suggestion that this framework restricts the poet and enables 'the containment of a desire' is misleading. Throughout her utilisation of the metaphor of spiritual fire, Rossetti suggests that earthly desires arise and find fulfilment in the ultimate heavenly conflagration. Expanding beyond any form of containment, she indicates that when positioned within a 'spiritual framing,' the lover's yearnings bring God into her vision and enable her to 'forgo' earthly pleasures for the sake of heavenly love (sonnet 6, line 5). Thus, rather than exploring the 'disappointing nature of earthly love,' I want to argue that Rossetti's concern is to explore the potential fulfilment offered by divine love.

In her preface to *Monna Innominata*, Rossetti acknowledges the 'barrier' that unfulfilled spiritual yearnings establish between the lover and her beloved

---

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Homans, 'Syllables of Velvet: Dickinson, Rossetti and the Rhetorics of Sexuality,' *Feminist Studies*, 11 (1985), 569-93 (p. 574).

<sup>30</sup> Natasha Distiller, *Desire and Gender in the Sonnet Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 125.



and highlights the historical and cultural situation in which her sequence is framed.

Beatrice, immortalised by “altissimo poeta... cotanto amante”; Laura, celebrated by a great tho’ inferior bard, have alike paid the exceptional penalty of exceptional honour, and have come down to us resplendent with charms, but (at least, to my apprehension) scant of attractiveness.

These heroines of world-wide fame were preceded by a bevy of unnamed ladies “donne innominate” sung by a school of less conspicuous poets: and in that land and that period which gave simultaneous birth to Catholics, to Albigenses, and to Troubadours, one can imagine many a lady as sharing her lover’s poetic aptitude, while the barrier between them might be one held sacred by both, yet not such as to render mutual love incompatible with mutual honour.

Had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified than any drawn even by a devoted friend. Or had the Great Poetess of our own day and nation only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the “Portuguese Sonnets,” an inimitable “*donna innominata*” drawn not from fancy but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura.

Susan Conley suggests that in this preface, Rossetti ‘offers an explicit rejection of the way in which woman is represented in the figure of the muse.’<sup>31</sup> In my analysis of her depictions of female beauty, I wish to argue that rather than offering a straight-forward ‘rejection’ of representations of the ‘nameless girl’ who fulfils the ‘dream’ of the male artist (‘In an Artist’s Studio,’ lines 6, 14), Rossetti’s implicit technique of working *within* traditional representations and transforming them through biblical typology means that she is able to engage with the traditional male vision whilst at the same time offering an ironic commentary on it. Thus, rather than allowing the Petrarchan structure to restrain and contain her expression, she actually utilises it as a tool of empowerment.

In their discussion of the cultural constraints placed upon the women writer, Gilbert and Gubar discuss the female technique of transcending the

---

<sup>31</sup> Susan Conley, “‘Poet’s Right’: Christina Rossetti as Anti-Muse and the Legacy of the “Poetess,”” in *Victorian Poetry*, 32 (1994), 365-384 (p. 373).

‘anxiety of authorship’ by revising male genres and ‘using them to record their own dreams and their own stories in *disguise*’ (italics in the original). They suggest that the authors who employ this technique

to use one of Harold Bloom’s key terms—“swerved” from the central sequences of male literary history, enacting a uniquely female process of revision and redefinition that necessarily caused them to seem “odd.” [...] In short, like the twentieth-century American poet H.D., who declared her aesthetic strategy by entitling one of her novels *Palimpsest*, women from Jane Austen and Mary Shelley to Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible [...] levels of meaning. Thus these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards. (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 73)

Whilst Gilbert and Gubar’s definition of ‘revision and redefinition’ is helpful in initiating an analysis of Rossetti’s poetic techniques it is also limiting in that, rather than ‘simultaneously conforming to and subverting’ the writings of Dante and Petrarch, the model that *Monna Innominata* offers is too complex to fit the Bloomian model of intertextuality. With its utilisation of double epigraphs for each sonnet and its layers of biblical, classical, and medieval allusion, I want to suggest that rather than reading *Monna Innominata* as a ‘palimpsest [...] whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible [...] levels of meaning,’ it should be read in conjunction with the typological schema through which Rossetti interprets Scripture. Indeed, concluding sonnet 3, the speaker’s declaration that ‘there be nothing new beneath the sun’ (line 14) looks back to Ecclesiastes 1:9, ‘The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.’ By echoing this verse, she demonstrates the inadequacy of the palimpsest framework and emphasises the notion that nothing is being written over or

rendered new. Rather, she suggests that the underlying truth of God's creation is finally being uncovered.

In an entry she wrote in 1863 for *The Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography*, Rossetti notes how 'Francesco Petrarcha' describes, with 'untiring minuteness,' Laura's 'bare hand, her dainty glove, her sweet speech and sweet laugh, her tears, her paleness, [and] her salutation.' Despite falling prey to the 'fearful pestilence' which 'ravaged Europe' in 1348, she writes that Laura was 'ever regarded by him [Petrarcha] as invested with the pristine charm' that first 'captivated' his heart.<sup>32</sup> Rather than rejecting the 'pristine charm' of the individual muse and invalidating the 'resplendent charms' of Laura and Beatrice as palimpsestic, I would like to suggest that in her preface to *Monna Innominata*, Rossetti strives to render their charms pre-figurative *types* of inner beauty.

In her critical biography of Rossetti, Jan Marsh indicates her familiarity with Francis Hueffer's 1878 book, *The Troubadours: A History of Provençal Life and Literature in the Middle Ages*.<sup>33</sup> In this, Hueffer writes that

In a poetry so thoroughly imbued with one prevailing passion as is that of the troubadours, and in the civilisation of which this poetry is the utterance, woman naturally occupied a most important place. But to define this place is a matter of some difficulty. The poems of the troubadours themselves give us but scanty information in this respect. We there hear a great deal of the incomparable charms of Provençal ladies; their loving-kindness is extolled, or their cruelty complained of. But in few cases only are we enabled to realise from generalities of this kind on individual human beings with individual passions or caprices.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Christina Rossetti, 'Petrarcha, Francesco' in *The Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography*, 3 vols, ed. by John Francis Waller (London: W. Mackenzie, 1863), in *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by David A. Kent and P.G. Stanwood (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998) pp. 163-168 (p. 164-6).

<sup>33</sup> Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 457.

<sup>34</sup> Francis Hueffer, *The Troubadours: A History of Provençal Life and Literature in the Middle Ages* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1878), p. 272.

In her discussion of *Monna Innominata*, Roe suggests that Rossetti ‘shies away’ from Hueffer’s ‘notion of individuality,’ when she replaces it with ‘the euphemistic ‘attractiveness’’ (Roe, p. 67-8). Rather than shying away from Hueffer’s notion of individuality, by replacing his depiction of ‘individual passions’ with the term ‘attractiveness,’ I want to counter Roe’s view and suggest that Rossetti exemplifies her move away from a concern with mapping individual personality and towards a concern with representing the beatified Communion of Saints. Indeed, rather than claiming to speak for Beatrice or Laura, by choosing to articulate the journey of one amongst ‘a bevy of unnamed ladies “donne innominate” sung by a school of less conspicuous poets,’ Rossetti further emphasises the representative, rather than individual, status of her speaker. Read through the framework of the collective, or representative, articulation of believers in “Out of the Deep,” this journey of Rossetti’s Monna Innominata, or ‘unnamed lady,’ takes on added spiritual depth and renders her ‘attractiveness’ a result of striving to mirror God.

In *The Altar*, Williams highlights the notion of spiritual symbiosis whereby individuals absorb godly ‘attractiveness’ by mirroring the divine. In his contemplation of the Ascension, he exemplifies his understanding of this symbiosis when he focuses on issues of absence and desire.

‘Tis said, in love there is this mystery,  
 That we cannot recall the absent glance,  
 Nor very self of a dear countenance,  
 When far away; of this the cause may be  
 That those we love are one with us, and we  
 Cannot behold ourselves. When out of sight  
 Thus love runs forth to what is infinite;  
 And so the more we love, the less we see.  
 (*The Altar*, xxxiii.3, lines 1-8).

Using the dynamics of human relationships to typologically anticipate her later reflection that the love of God makes the individual forgetful of self and to foreground the belief that only ‘Love understands the mystery, whereof | We can but spell a surface history’ (“Judge nothing before the time,” *CP*, p. 503, lines 1-2); in the octave of the second sonnet of *Monna Innominata*, Rossetti’s speaker focuses on her lapse of memory.

I wish I could remember, that first day,  
First hour, first moment of your meeting me,  
If bright or dim the season, it might be  
Summer of Winter for aught I can say;  
So unrecorded did it slip away,  
So blind I was to see and to foresee,  
So dull to mark the budding of my tree  
That would not blossom yet for many a May. (lines 1-8)

Read in conjunction with Williams’ suggestion that ‘the more we love, the less we see’ (line 8), it would seem that ‘the love’ that makes Rossetti’s speaker and her lover ‘one’ (sonnet 5, line 14) is actually the *cause* of the forgetfulness she laments. In the thirteenth sonnet, she highlights her individual ‘helpless[ness]’ in the face of God’s foreknowledge and speaks of her ‘understanding dull’ and ‘sight most dim’ (lines 11, 12). However, it is in accepting her limitations and lack of understanding that, she suggests, the believer can reach an understanding of her true identity in God. With this in mind, the lack of comprehension that the speaker articulates in the thirteenth sonnet can be read so as to offer a corrective typology to the earthly sentiments she voices in the second.

In her discussion of ‘The Economics of Ecstasy in Christina Rossetti’s *Monna Innominata*,’ Krista Lysack suggests that sonnets two and thirteen both revolve around the notion of touch as ‘the space between parted lovers’ and as the means of remembrance when they are apart. She argues that

these two sonnets bear structural relation to each other in that they “touch” each other as the second and second-last sonnets of the sequence, circulating around the centerlessness inherent in an indivisible, fourteen-sonnet sequence.<sup>35</sup>

As I indicated in my discussion of *Later Life* and ‘Seven Vials,’ Rossetti’s deployment of chiasmic structures always revolves around a central axis. Rather than remaining ‘centerless’ as Lysak suggests, I wish to argue that *Monna Innominata* finds its centre in sonnets seven and eight. Indeed, providing the axis from which the rest of the sequence evolves, these central sonnets root the sequence in the chiasmus of the crucifixion.

By ending sonnet 7 with the declaration ‘love is strong as death,’ and by beginning sonnet 8 with Esther’s words, “‘I, if I perish, perish,” Rossetti highlights a shift from earthly to divine contemplations of love and exemplifies the centrality of her belief that divine love overcomes all else and causes the believer to actively desire to forgo her own individual concerns and become one with the Communion of Saints. In chapter four, I considered Rossetti’s emphasis on communal identity when I discussed her proclamation, ‘Stars, like Christians, utter their silent voice to all lands and their speechless words to the ends of the world. Christians are called to be like stars, luminous, steadfast, majestic, *attractive*’ (*TF*, January 2; p. 2, emphasis mine). In *Time Flies*, Rossetti uses Psalm 45 in order to show how female ‘attractiveness’ can be understood as a facet of the partial indication of the inner spiritual depth that Paul alludes to in that it serves as an index of character as well as a metaphor. After comparing the inner bark of the exotic mezereon plant to lace, she introduces the symbiosis that exists on a symbolic level, between internal purity and external beauty, when she

---

<sup>35</sup> Krista Lysack, ‘The Economics of Ecstasy in Christina Rossetti’s *Monna Innominata*,’ *Victorian Poetry*, 36 (1998), 399-416 (p. 408-9).

claims that as the plant wears its lace within, the women wear theirs without and together they make up between them one image of that “king’s daughter” who, being “all glorious within”, is also “brought unto the king in raiment of needlework”; the lace and the needlework in question being alike such as no needle could embroider. Yet, she writes, the mezereon clad in its own lace lining, manifests one marked superiority over women arrayed visibly in the same lace for it becomes the emblem of St Peter’s ideal matron who concentrates not on her outward appearance- the plaiting of her hair, wearing of her gold or putting on of her apparel, but on cultivating a ‘meek and quiet spirit.’ ‘For after this manner’, St Peter writes, the women of old adorned themselves. (1 Peter 3:3-5) After briefly referring to 1 Peter, Rossetti concludes her meditation with the question ‘is the whole of *our* lace on the surface?’ (italics in the original, *TF*, August 3; p. 149).

The process of loading mortal loveliness with spiritual significance can be read in conjunction with the idea of a deep surface, utilised by Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro in their book, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body*. They suggest that

The unfixable character of dress as both a personal and a communal phenomenon is largely due to its ability to quiz conventional understandings of the relationship between surface and depth. The conventional reading of dress as a superficial form to be penetrated in order to gain access to a deep content, obviously based on the primary notions of depth and content over those of surface and form, is radically challenged by a reading whereby the superficial forms of people and objects are seen to possess their own kind of depth.<sup>36</sup>

In moving beyond the primary notions of depth and content they claim that, like a symbolic language, clothing can speak volumes about submerged dimensions

---

<sup>36</sup> Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro. *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress, and the Body* (New York: Berg Press, 1998) p. xxii.

of experience. As such, they regard it as a ‘deep surface,’ a facet of existence which cannot be regulated to the psyche’s innermost hidden depths but which actually expresses itself through apparently superficial means (p. 135). With this in mind, I want to suggest how expanding their concept of the ‘deep surface’ to include images, paintings, and bodily and textual surfaces can give rise to a radical re-visioning of Rossetti’s donna.

In her discussion of Dante in *The Churchman’s Shilling Magazine* in 1867, Rossetti engages with the problems which could potentially arise from adhering to the tendency to stop short of looking for meanings beneath the surface when she writes that

No reader ought [...] to stop at so bare an understanding of what may be termed the surface-plot [...] without touching upon the allegorical significations which meet us with more or less of salience in page after page, without approaching that more abstruse analogical system of interpretation which, as may be inferred from the “Convito,” Dante himself suggests as application to the “Divine Commedia,” the entire poem is alive with classical and historical allusions, for lack of familiarity with which numberless passages can only remain as keyless puzzles.<sup>37</sup>

Rather than contending that readers should discard, ‘what may be termed the surface-plot,’ by suggesting that ‘allegorical significations [...] meet us with more or less of salience in page after page,’ she argues that it is by concentrating on an analogical reading of certain salient details of the text that the key to, what Warwick and Cavallaro term, the ‘deep surface’ can be found.

Although, like the “Divine Commedia,” each of the sonnets of *Monna Innominata* ‘is alive with classical and historical allusions,’ I want to suggest that it is in sonnet 8 that Rossetti most fully expounds and negotiates the complexities

---

<sup>37</sup> Christina Rossetti, “Dante, An English Classic,” ” *The Churchman’s Shilling Magazine and Family Treasury* 2 (October 1867), pp. 200-5, in Kent and Stanwood, eds., *Selected Prose*, pp. 169-173 (p. 171).



involved in simultaneously interpreting both superficial ‘charms’ and a more implicit spiritual ‘attractiveness.’

“I, if I perish, perish”- Esther spake  
 And bride of life or death she made her fair  
 In all the lustre of her perfumed hair  
 And smiles that kindle longing but to slake.  
 She put on pomp of loveliness, to take  
 Her husband thro’ his eyes at unaware;  
 She spread abroad her beauty for a snare,  
 Harmless as doves and subtle as a snake.  
 She trapped him by wisdom of her wit,  
 And built her people’s house that it should stand:-  
 If I might take my life so in my hand,  
 And for my love to Love put up my prayer,  
 And for love’s sake by Love be granted it!

Continuing to employ traditional Petrarchan patterning, Rossetti uses the eighth line as the ‘turn’ of this sonnet when she describes Esther as ‘harmless as doves and subtle as a snake.’ Thus, she predicates the movement towards analogical and typological interpretation in the latter half of the sequence. By implicitly linking Esther to Jesus’ disciples who are sent out ‘as sheep in the midst of wolves’ and instructed to be ‘wise as serpents, and harmless as doves’ (Matthew 10:16), she can be seen to provide one of the ‘keys’ which will unlock elements of its ‘deep surface.’

Set in the period of the Babylonish Captivity, the book of Esther recalls the act of the Jewish Queen who put her own life at risk by approaching the King unannounced in an attempt to redeem the Jewish nation from destruction. In her study of literary appropriations of the figure of Esther, Jo Carruthers suggests that ‘Esther is not the woman warrior like Judith: she works by wile and cunning. Appropriations of her are therefore not radically feminist, but often wield power

from marginal and weak positions.’<sup>38</sup> I would like to suggest that whilst Esther is by no means a radical ‘woman warrior like Judith,’ Rossetti’s appropriation of her is more ‘radically feminist’ than has often been acknowledged. Indeed, her appropriation is radical in the sense that it advocates a return to a purely Scriptural understanding of the Jewish heroine and feminist in the sense that it proposes that women are no further from mirroring Christ than their male counterparts. It is precisely through her implied connection with Jesus and his disciples that, I want to argue, Rossetti signals Esther’s ‘attractiveness.’ Rather than emphasising her simple ‘charms,’ by linking Esther to the disciples, Rossetti highlights her place as a forerunner of Christ and thus implicitly suggests reading the words ‘fair,’ ‘lustre,’ ‘kindle,’ and ‘loveliness’ (lines 2,3,4,5) in an eschatological framework.

When read alongside the depiction of ‘the lustre’ of her ‘perfumed hair’ (line 3), the allusion to acting as ‘subtle as a snake’ counters the negative imagery of the ‘subtle serpents gliding’ in the ‘hair’ of ‘The World’ (*CP*, p. 70-1, line 4) or of the milkmaid’s ‘shining serpent coils’ in ‘The Prince’s Progress’ (*CP*, p. 89-104, line 94). Indeed, in her depiction of Esther, Rossetti introduces some of the complications inherent in reading a woman’s beauty as a transparent index to her character. As well as being devious and threatening, she demonstrates that female charms and seductive beauty can also be used both as a vehicle for self-expression and as a tool through which to further God’s kingdom. Throughout *Verses*, Rossetti uses the word ‘lustre’ to speak of Heavenly glory. For instance, in ‘Ye, blessed and holy’ (*CP*, p. 496), she writes that ‘we gaze [...] | On this lustre of God and of Christ, this creature of flawless

---

<sup>38</sup> Jo Carruthers, ‘Reading and Culture: The Strange and Difficult Book of Esther’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Manchester, 2002), p. 145.

perfection' (lines 2-3). Added to this, in *The Face of the Deep*, she indicates the potential each believer has for exhibiting a godly lustre when she writes that 'Great saints by spiritual lustre outshine the visible lustre of Moses. But every Christian is in his or her degree Veronica (true image) of Christ' (p. 329).

I want to suggest that it is the realisation of the potential for attaining Christ's 'attractiveness' that enables the speaker of *Monna Innominata* to declare 'If I might take my life so in my hand | And for my love to Love put up my prayer, | And for love's sake by Love be granted it!' (lines 12-14). This suggestion stands in direct contradistinction to Cynthia Scheinberg's contention that the phrase 'If I might' reveals 'deep differences between Esther and the poem's speaker.' She argues,

Whereas Esther "takes her life in her hand" through her public and political actions - appearing unbidden before the king, orchestrating the ultimate saving of all Jews in the kingdom - the speaker can "take her life in her hand" either through the act of prayer; by writing, or by threatening her Christian life by acting on the desire of her body, "her hand." But, even as the metonym "hand" attempts to bridge the gap in Esther's and the speaker's access to female agency, when the speaker asks "if [she] might" make this connection to Esther, the conclusion the sonnet leads to is that in truth, this Christian woman can never really be like Esther at all.<sup>39</sup>

My basis for arguing, in opposition to Scheinberg, that Rossetti actually uses the phrase, 'If I might,' to conflate her speaker with the figure of Esther, is rooted in a consideration of her pattern of typology. Recognising that 'Faith runs with each and rears an eager face' (sonnet 10, line 3), Rossetti suggests that Divine grace enables the individual to become a vessel or conduit of God and that Christ's crucifixion allows believers to overcome their hesitancy and enter the Communion of Saints. Read in the context of her conflation of Noah's hand

---

<sup>39</sup> Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 141.

which pulled the dove to safety, with Jesus' hands which were nailed to the cross and opened wide for the protection of each believer, I wish to suggest that Rossetti bases her conflation of Esther's hand with the speaker's upon her belief in the unity of Scripture and the inclusiveness of the crucifixion. In *The Face of the Deep*, she likens the act of taking one's life in one's hand to prayer when she writes, 'O my God, Who acceptedst Daniel when taking his life in his hand he set his face in prayer toward desolate Jerusalem, grant us such grace that night and day our eyes may be directed toward Thy heavenly Temple, and our faces set steadfastly toward New Jerusalem the mother of us all' (*FD*, p. 147). Reflecting back upon *Monna Innominata* the notion that it is possible for every believer to take one's life in one's hand means recognising both the power Rossetti attributes to the act of prayer and the interpretative space she creates where she invites the reader to reach her own typological understanding.

Just as Rossetti implicitly invites her readers to reach self-understanding through the process of typological interpretation; in his translations of Dante and Petrarch, Charles Bagot Cayley focuses on the space between the author and the reader as the generator of meaning and as the basis for the typological model of interpretation. In the preface to his 1879 translation of *The Sonnets and Stanzas of Petrarch*, he demonstrates an awareness of his readers' responses when he writes,

I have felt [...] how hard it is to approach the exquisite sweetness of Petrarch's verse, but I have been encouraged in my attempt by thinking that this very sweetness, so far as it supported by the natural advantages of the Italian language, is apt to overpower the ear of the Northern general reader, and dull his apprehension of the fine and original sentiment of which it has been made the vehicle.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> *The Sonnets and Stanzas of Petrarch*, trans. by Charles Bagot Cayley (London: Longmans, Green & co., 1879), p. iv.

Whilst late twentieth-century critics such as Marsh have read Rossetti's allusions to Cayley's translations for 'clues' as to their personal relationship (Marsh, p. 474), I want to propose reading the correspondences that exist between Cayley's translations and Rossetti's sonnets as indications of the revisionary aspects of her typological poetics. Like his translations, her sonnets work to encourage and excite readers rather than 'overpower' them or 'dull' their senses.

Holmes responds to the critics who locate the composition of *Monna Innominata* in 1866, when Rossetti is believed to have declined Cayley's offer of marriage, by suggesting that if it was as 'deeply personal as it has so often read to be, it is hardly likely that [Rossetti] would have guarded it for fifteen years only to publish it in 1881 while Cayley was still alive' (Holmes, p. 44). Adding to this reasoning, I want to suggest that 1881 is a more likely date for the composition of the sequence since it follows on from Cayley's 1879 translation of Petrarch's sonnets. In both, the concern to gradually and implicitly exemplify the connotations of specific words serves as a shaping force to the poetics. In their article, 'Christina Rossetti's Copy of C.B. Cayley's *Divine Comedy*,' Kamilla Denman and Sarah Smith initiate the late twentieth-century concern to move away from a biographical to a more literary reading of *Monna Innominata*. They consider how Rossetti annotated and corrected the set of four volumes which comprise Cayley's *terza rima* English version of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and note how she corrects the 'points at which Cayley has deviated from the ternary rhyme pattern' and questions his biblical exegesis.<sup>41</sup>

I wish to suggest that Rossetti's implicit corrections, which shaped the biblical exegesis contained in the second edition of Cayley's translations of

---

<sup>41</sup> Kamilla Denman and Sarah Smith, 'Christina Rossetti's Copy of C.B. Cayley's *Divine Comedy*,' *Victorian Poetry*, 32 (1994), 315-338 (p. 315, 324, 327).

Petrarch's sonnets, can be read in terms of the 'silent voice' which is 'luminous, steadfast, majestic, [and] attractive' (*TF*, see above). Read in conjunction with sonnet 14 of *Monna Innominata*, the notion that the 'silent voice' can be representative of noble and spiritual qualities renders the position of the unnamed lady in a more positive light than has hitherto been observed.

Youth gone, and beauty gone if ever there  
 Dwelt beauty in so poor a face as this;  
 Youth gone and beauty, what remains of bliss?  
 I will not bind fresh roses in my hair,  
 To shame a cheek at best but little fair,-  
 "Leave youth his roses, who can bear a thorn,-  
 I will not seek for blossoms anywhere,  
 Except such common flowers as blow with corn.  
 Youth gone and beauty gone, what doth remain?  
 The longing of a heart pent up forlorn,  
 A silent heart whose silence loves and longs:  
 The silence of a heart which sang its songs  
 While youth and beauty made a summer morn,  
 Silence of love that cannot sing again.

William Whitla suggests that through this sonnet Rossetti ends her sequence

'with an expression of a much darker heart where art fades into silence.'<sup>42</sup>

However, when it is considered in the context of its scriptural allusions and its place within Rossetti's entire corpus, the silence that it expresses can be seen as pertaining to the 'attractive' star-like quality she speaks of in *Time Flies*. Indeed, rather than struggling to maintain her 'youth' and 'beauty' (lines 9, 13), the speaker is able to escape the burden of her body and hide herself in that 'Silence of love' (line 14) which is representative of the redemptive process. Furthermore, considered alongside its epigraphs, the sonnet can be seen to exemplify a change of focus from the 'charms' of the speaker to her 'attractiveness.' Taken from Petrarch, Rossetti's second epigraph for the sonnet translates 'Alone with these

---

<sup>42</sup> William Whitla, 'Questioning the Convention; Christina Rossetti's Sonnet Sequence "Monna Innominata"', in *The Achievement* (see Rosenblum, above), pp. 82-131 (p. 113).

my thoughts, with altered hair' (Whitla, p. 100). With 'Youth gone, and beauty gone' (line 1), the speaker claims that she will no longer 'bind fresh roses' in her hair (line 4). Rather than rendering herself a beautiful object, she suggests that she will withdraw from the world and instead wait on God. I want to argue that it is this act of waiting that characterises Rossetti's *Verses* and perpetuates the longing for divine communion that, she repeatedly suggests, enables the believer to rise upwards as a flame and lose her individuality in the conflagration of heaven.

### **Afterward: 'For ever One, the Same and Manifold'**

In the course of this thesis, I have argued that the particular typological lens that Rossetti employs gives shape and meaning to her poetry and devotional prose and enables her to explore the thresholds which separate life and death, and time and eternity. I wish to conclude by emphasising that this lens is predicated on her firm conviction that God is 'For ever One, the Same and Manifold' ('Seven Vials hold Thy wrath,' CP, p. 389-90, line 8). The belief that God is 'For ever One' indicates that he transcends the realms of time and holds the world in unity. The notion that he is the 'Same' prefigures Rossetti's conflation of Noah with Christ (lines 9-14) and forms the basis upon which her typological readings of Scripture are made. Finally, the belief that God is 'Manifold' underpins Rossetti's understanding of trinitarian personhood and forms the basis for her explication of the multiplicity of the human subject who, mirroring the divine, cannot be understood as a single unified entity.

In chapter five, considering how Rossetti utilises the metaphor of hanging to exemplify the difficulties of remaining faithful on the threshold on Heaven, I investigated her suggestion that the step of self-oblation in imitating the crucifixion is the hardest obstacle an individual can overcome. Arguing that 'the cross is the nucleus of heaven' (FD, p. 504), I demonstrated how the glimpses of Heaven, that Rossetti has the speaker's of her devotional poetry experience, come after the pain of self-sacrifice. With this in mind, I wish to highlight that, by encouraging her readers to follow the example St. Andrew who 'saluted' the cross 'in a rapture of devout love' (*TF*, 30 November; p. 228), Rossetti demonstrates her adherence to the belief that each individual can conflate herself



with Christ by acknowledging her willingness to forego all selfish concerns. By making the comparison between the martyrdom of St. Andrew and the life of the individual believer implicit rather than explicit, she demonstrates her practice of her theology which relies on the collaboration of the reader for fulfilment. As I have indicated, this collaboration utilises the Tractarian doctrine of Reserve and reinforces the practice of mystical interpretation that was revived in the mid to late nineteenth century.

In 1999, Mary Arseneau, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, and Antony Harrison asked, 'What does the future hold for Rossetti studies?' They suggested that if their edited collection is any indication,

we will see more contextualisation's of Rossetti's art within a variety of interrelated discourses, including those that address issue of gender, science, economics, politics, aesthetics, religion, or class structure.<sup>1</sup>

A central facet of this study has been the consideration of Rossetti's writings within the context of patristic and medieval discourses. With a particular focus on the eight sections of *Verses*, I have explored the ways in which Rossetti utilised the pattern initiated by the Patristic Fathers, of integrating biblical phrases into her own reflections. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how, by using this technique to integrate her poetics into the biblical schema, she was able to offer a revisionary hermeneutics within the framework of an authentic tradition and dramatise the process of the believer finding purpose in a relationship with God and meaning within the Communion of Saints. Looking beyond a simple contextualisation of Rossetti's work in the framework of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Arseneau, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, and Antony Harrison, 'Introduction,' in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999), p. xvii.

Oxford Movement, I demonstrated how she works in conjunction with, yet manages to nuance, the writings of her fellow Tractarians.

The implications of my study for Victorian scholars lie in its recognition of the typological methods of interpretation utilised in the nineteenth century together with the models of identity they give rise to. As I have demonstrated, this recognition is not only applicable to hermeneutical readings of the Bible but also encourages interpreting the various works of a single author or a movement in conjunction with one another. Challenging the Anglo-American feminist argument that the individual is a unified entity, my interpretation of Rossetti's exploration of the patristic model of trinitarian personhood offers a new approach to reading identity in Victorian literature. It will, I hope, encourage further consideration of the models of selfhood offered in nineteenth-century devotional poetry alongside the theology of the Early Church.



## Bibliography

I have divided my bibliography into three parts. First, I list the writings of Christina Rossetti. Next, I list all the sources originally published during, or prior to, the nineteenth century. This includes edited editions of earlier works. Finally, I list secondary sources and contemporary criticism.

### Works of Christina Rossetti

—, *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*, text by R.W. Crump, notes and introduction by Betty S. Flowers (London: Penguin, 2001)

—, *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti* ed. by David A. Kent, and P.G. Stanwood (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998)

—, *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, 4 vols, ed. by Antony Harrison (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1997-2004)

—, *Christina Rossetti: Poems and Prose*, ed. by Jan Marsh (London: Everyman, 1994)

—, *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillian & co., 1904)

—, *The Face of the Deep: A devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 1892)

—, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (London: SPCK, 1885)

—, *Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments* (London and Brighton: SPCK, 1883)

—, *Called to Be Saints, The Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied* (London: SPCK, 1881)

—, *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite* (London: SPCK, 1879)

—, *Annus Domini: A Prayer for Each Day of the Year* (London: James Parker & Co, 1874)

—, “Dante, An English Classic,” *The Churchman’s Shilling Magazine and Family Treasury* 2 (October 1867), pp. 200-5, in Kent and Stanwood, eds., *Selected Prose*, pp. 169-173

—, 'Petrarcha, Francesco' in *The Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography* (1857-63), 3 vols, ed. by John Francis Waller (London: W. Mackenzie, 1863), in Kent and Stanwood, eds., *Selected Prose*, pp. 163-168

—, 'unpublished notes on Genesis' (n.d), in Lynda Palazzo, 'The Prose Works of Christina Rossetti' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Durham, 1992), Appendix A

## Primary Sources

St Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine Revised from a Former Translation*, trans. by Edward Pusey (Oxford, John Henry Parker: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, London: 1843)

Barrett Browning, Elizabeth, *Aurora Leigh* (1857; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Bell, Mackenzie, *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (1898; New York: Haskell House Pub. Ltd, 1971)

*The Book of Common Prayer, and administration of the sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England: together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in churches* (Manchester: T. Allen, 1799)

Burrows, Henry W., *The Half-Century of Church, St Pancras, Albany Street* (London: Skeffington and Son, 1887)

*The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, 7 vols, ed. by F.S. Ellis (1483; London, J.M. Dent, 1900-1931), vii

Eliot, George, *Middlemarch* (1874; Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994)

Gaskell, Elizabeth, *North and South* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994)

Herbert, George, *The Temple: sacred poems and private ejaculations* in *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, ed. by John Tobin (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2004)

Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,' in *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000) pp. 857-863

Hueffer, Francis, *The Troubadours: A History of Provençal Life and Literature in the Middle Ages* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1878)

Keats, John, *The Complete Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Paul Wright (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2001)

Keble, John, 'Tract 89, On the Mysticism Attributed to the Fathers of the Church,' in *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford*, 6 vols (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1841), vi.

—, *The Christian Year* (Oxford; London: James Parker and Co, 1866)

Landon, Letitia Elizabeth, *Life and Literary Remains*, 2 vols. (London: Fisher, Son & Co, 1841), i

Liddon, Henry Parry, *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, 1894), iii

Littledale, Richard Frederick, *A Commentary on The Song of Songs from Ancient and Medieval Sources* (London: Joseph Masters, 1869)

Maturin, Charles R., *Melmoth the Wanderer: A Tale* (1820; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977)

Neale, John Mason, and Richard Frederick Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Medieval Writers*, 4 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Joseph Masters & Co., 1869- 1883)

Neale, John Mason, *Medieval Preachers and Medieval Preaching: A series of extracts, translated from the sermons of the middle ages* (London: J. & C. Mozley)

Newman, John Henry, *The Church of the Fathers*, in *Historical Sketches*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1906), ii, pp. 1-216

—, 'Tract 3, On Alterations in the Liturgy' in *Tracts for the Times*, i

—, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* 1834-42. 8 vols. (London, Oxford, & Cambridge: Rivingtons 1870), i

—, *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church: Via Media* (1837; 1838; 1877), in *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, ed. by H.D. Weidner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

Coventry Patmore, 'The Angel in the House' (1856), in *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000), pp. 557-560.

Petrarch, Francesco, *The Sonnets and Stanzas of Petrarch*, trans. by Charles Bagot Cayley (London: Longmans, Green & co., 1879)

Pusey, Edward 'Preface,' in Père Jean-Joseph Surin, *The Foundations of The Spiritual Life: Drawn from the Book of the Imitation of Jesus Christ* (London: John Henry Parker, 1847)

—, 'The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist,' A Sermon preached before the University in the Cathedral Church of Christ in Oxford (Oxford, 1853; repr. Kessinger Publishing co., 2004) v

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *The House of Life*, in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 127-158

—, 'Hand and Soul' (1850), in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*, pp. 309-318

—, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir by William Michael Rossetti*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti, 2 vols. (London, Ellis & Elvey, 1895), ii

Rossetti, Maria Francesca, *Letters to My Bible Class on Thirty-Nine Sundays*, (London; Oxford: Christian Knowledge Society, 1872)

—, *A Shadow of Dante* (London: Rivingtons, 1871)

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 'On Love' (1828), in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 631-2

Shipley, Orby, ed. *Lyra Eucharistica: Hymns and Verse on the Holy Communion, Ancient and Modern; with other poems*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Longman & Green, 1864)

Swinburne, Algernon Charles, *A Century of Roundels*, in *Swinburne's Collected Poetical Works* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1927), pp. 523-707

St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, ed. by E. Allison Peers (1580; Originally published, Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1961; repr. Image Edition: Doubleday, 2004)

Williams, Isaac, 'Our Lord's Nativity,' *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative*, 8 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1891), iii

—, *The Characters of the Old Testament* (London, Oxford, & Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1869)

—, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 8 vols. (London: Rivingtons, 1864), i

—, *A Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1850)

—, *The Altar; or, Meditations in Verse on the Great Christian Sacrifice* (London: Joseph Masters, 1849)

—, 'Tract 80: On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge,' *Tracts for the Times*, iv

### Secondary sources

Allchin, Arthur M., *The Silent Rebellion : Anglican Religious Communities, 1845-1900*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1958)

Armstrong, Isobel, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford, Blackwell: 2000)

—, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-century Poetry* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982)

Arseneau, Mary, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, and Antony Harrison, eds., *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999)

Arseneau, Mary and Jan Marsh, 'Intertextuality and Intratextuality: The Full Text of Christina Rossetti's "Harmony on First Corinthians XIII Rediscovered"', *Victorian Newsletter*, 88 (1995), 17-26

Arseneau, Mary, 'Pews, Periodicals, and Politics: The Rossetti Women as High Church Controversialists,' in D. Clifford and L. Roussillon, eds., *Outsiders Looking in: The Rossettis Then and Now* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp. 97-114

—, 'Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and Goblin Market', *Victorian Poetry*, 31 (1993), 79-93

Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, translated from the French by Maria Jolas; foreword by Etienne Gilson, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969)

Baring-Gould, Rev. S., *The Lives of the Saints; Volume the Second, February* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1914)

Bernstein, Susan David, 'Radical Readers at the British Museum: Eleanor Marx, Clementina Black, Amy Levy,' *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, 3.2 (2007), <www.ncgsjournal.com> [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> August 2008]

Blair, Kirstie, 'Church Architecture, Tractarian Poetry and the Forms of Faith,' in Victoria Morgan, and Clare Williams, eds., *Shaping Belief: Culture, Politics and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 129-145

—, *Victorian poetry and the culture of the heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006)



Bowles, Noelle, 'A Chink in the Armour: Christina Rossetti's 'the Prince's Progress,' 'A Royal Princess,' and Victorian Medievalism', *Women's Writing*, 12 (2005), 115-126

Brennan, Teresa, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2004)

Brilioth, Yngve, *The Anglican Revival, Studies in the Oxford movement* (London; New York: Longmans, Green, 1925)

Bronfen, Elisabeth, *Over Her Dead Body*, (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1992)

Brook, Stella, *The Language of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd, 1965)

Brown Tkacz, Catherine, 'Typology,' in Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 855-857

Bullen, Barrie, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Campbell, Matthew, *Rhythm and Will and Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Carroll, Robert and Stephen Prickett, 'Notes to the New Testament,' in *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 389-441

Carruthers, Jo, 'Reading and Culture: The Strange and Difficult Book of Esther' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Manchester, 2002)

Cary, Philip, 'The weight of love: Augustinian metaphors of movement in Dante's souls,' in Robert P. Kennedy, Kim Paffenroth, and John Doody, eds., *Augustine and Literature* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), pp.15-36

Casteras, Susan P., 'Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices', *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1980-1), 157-184

Chadwick, Owen, ed., *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960)

Chapman, Alison, 'Sonnet and Sonnet Sequence,' in Cronin and others, eds., *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, pp. 99-114

—, 'Father's Place, Mother's Space: Identity, Italy, and the Maternal' in Arseneau and others, eds., *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*

- Chapman, Raymond., *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970)
- Conley, Susan, "'Poet's Right': Christina Rossetti as Anti-Muse and the Legacy of the 'Poetess,'" *Victorian Poetry*, 32 (1994), 365-384
- Cronin, Richard, Alison Chapman, and Antony H. Harrison, eds., *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Malden: Mass: Blackwell, 2003)
- Crump, R.W., ed., *Christina Rossetti: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976)
- Daly, Mary, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1986)
- D'Amico, Diane and David Kent, 'Rossetti and the Tractarians,' *Victorian Poetry*, 44 (2006), 93-103
- D'Amico, Diane, *Faith Gender and Time* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999)
- , 'Christina Rossetti: The Maturin Poems,' *Victorian Poetry*, 19 (1981), 117-131
- , 'Christina Rossetti's *Christian Year*: Comfort for "the weary heart,"' *Victorian Newsletter*, 72 (1987), 36-42
- Denman, Kamilla, and Smith, Sarah, 'Christina Rossetti's Copy of C.B. Cayley's *Divine Comedy*,' *Victorian Poetry*, 32 (1994), 315-338
- Distiller, Natasha, *Desire and Gender in the Sonnet Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
- Evan, Daniel, *The Prayer-Book: its History, Language and Content*, (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co, 1901)
- Farmer, David Hugh, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- Flowers, Betty S., 'The Kingly Self: Rossetti as Woman Artist,' in Kent, ed., *The Achievement*, pp. 159-174
- Fraser, Hilary, 'St. Theresa, St. Dorothea, and Miss Brooke in Middlemarch', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 40 (1986), 400-411
- Frere, Walter Howard, ed., *A New History of the Book of Common Prayer with a Rationale of its Offices*, based on the work of Francis Proctor (London: Macmillan & Co, 1910)

Frye, Northrop, *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays 1979-1988* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1990)

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000)

Graef, Hilda, *Mary: A History of Devotion*, 2 parts (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963, 1965), ii

Harrison, Antony H., *Victorian Poets and the Politics of Culture: Discourse and Ideology* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1998)

—, 'Christina Rossetti and the Sage Discourse of Feminist High Anglicanism' in Thais E Morgan, ed., *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 87-104

—, *Christina Rossetti in Context* (Brighton: Harvester, 1988)

Hassett, Constance W., *Christina Rossetti : the patience of style* (London; Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005)

Holmes, John, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005)

Homans, Margaret, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986)

—, 'Syllables of Velvet: Dickinson, Rossetti and the Rhetorics of Sexuality,' *Feminist Studies*, 11 (1985), 569-93

Honnighausen, Gisela, 'Emblematic Tendencies in the Works of Christina Rossetti', *Victorian Poetry*, 10 (1972), 1-15

Jacobus, Mary, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986)

—, 'The Art of Managing Book: Romantic Prose and the Writing of the Past,' in Arden Reed, ed., *Romanticism and Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 215-246

James, Susan, Mary Hamer, Kate Flint, Amber Jacobs, and Gillian Beer, 'Perspectives on Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect*,' *Women: a cultural review*, 17:1 (2006), 103-117

James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Longmans, Green & co., 1901; repr. London: Penguin Classics, 1985)

Jantzen, Grace M., *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Jasper, David, 'Pusey's 'Lecture on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament,' in Perry Butler, ed., *Pusey Rediscovered*, ed. by (London: SPCK, 1983), pp. 51-70

Joynes, Christine E., 'Treasure in Heaven? Christina Rossetti's use of Ecclesiastes,' in Christine E. Joynes, ed., *The Quest for Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Philip Budd* (Cambridge, Orchard Academic, 2002), pp. 7-28

Kachur, Robert M., 'Repositioning the Female Christian Reader: Christina Rossetti as Tractarian Hermeneut in *The Face of the Deep*', *Victorian Poetry*, 35 (1997), 193-213

Kent, David A., ed., *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987)

—, "'By thought, word, and deed": George Herbert and Christina Rossetti', in Kent, ed., *The Achievement*

—, 'Sequence and Meaning in Christina Rossetti's *Verses* (1893)' in *Victorian Poetry*, 17 (1979), 259-264

Knoepfelmacher, U.C., 'Avenging Alice: Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll,' *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 41 (1986) 299-328

Kooistra, Lorraine Janzen, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002)

—, 'Visualising the Fantastic Subject: Goblin Market and the Gaze,' in Arseneau and others, eds., *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*, pp. 137-169

Levertov, Denise, *New Selected Poems* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2003)

Lootens, Tricia, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1996)

Lossky, Nicolas, 'The Oxford Movement and the Revival of Patristic Theology,' in Paul Vaiss, ed., *From Oxford to the People* (Hertfordshire: Gracewing, 1996), pp. 76-82

Lysack, Krista, 'The Economics of Ecstasy in Christina Rossetti's *Monna Innominata*,' *Victorian Poetry*, 36 (1998), 399-416

Marsh, Jan, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994)

Marshall, Linda E., 'Mysteries Beyond Angels in Christina Rossetti's from House to Home' in Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, eds., *Women's Poetry, Late-Romantic to Late-Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900* (Basingstoke; New York: Macmillan; St. Martin's, 1999), pp. 313-24

—, 'What the Dead are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti', *Victorian Newsletter*, 72 (1987) 55- 60

*Mary: Grace and Hope and Christ*, The Seattle Statement: Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II: 2004),  
<<http://www.ecumenism.net>> [accessed 22 February 2008]

Mason, Emma, 'The Trouble with Comfort: Christina Rossetti, John Ruskin, and Leafy Emotion,' *Yearbook of English Studies*, 36 (2006), 169-79

—, "'A Sort of Aesthetic-Catholic Revival.' Christina Rossetti and the London Ritualist Scene,' in D. Clifford and L. Roussillon, *Outsiders Looking in*, pp. 115-130

—, 'Christina Rossetti and the Doctrine of Reserve', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 7 (2002), 196-219

—, 'Religious Intellectuals: The Poetic Gravity of Emily Bronte and Christina Rossetti' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2000)

Maxwell, Catherine, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2001)

—, 'Engendering Vision in the Victorian Male Poet', in Barrie Bullen, ed., *Writing and Victorianism* (Longman, London: 1997), pp. 73-103

McGann, Jerome, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1972)

—, "The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti," in Joseph Bristow, ed., *Victorian Women Poets. Emily Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti*, (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1995), pp. 167-188

Michie, Helena, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Miller, Nancy K., *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986)

Moers, Ellen, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1986)

Moi, Toril, *Sexual/ Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1998)

Morrill, David F., “‘Twilight is not good for maidens’: Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in *Goblin Market*,’ *Victorian Poetry*, 28 (1990), 1-16

Morrison, Robert and Chris Baldick, eds., *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. vii-xxii

Morse-Boycott, Desmond, *Lead, Kindly Light: Studies of Saints and Heroes of the Oxford Movement* (London: The Centenary Press, 1933)

Mumm, Susan, ed., *All Saints Sisters of the Poor: an Anglican sisterhood in the nineteenth century* (Woodbridge : Boydell, 2001)

—, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain* (London & New York: Leicester University Press, 1999)

Nicholson, D.H.S. and A.H.S. Lee, eds., *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917)

Packer, Lona Mosk, *Christina Rossetti* (Berkeley; Cambridge: University of California Press : Cambridge University Press, 1963)

Parker, Roszika, *The Subversive Stitch: embroidery and the making of the feminine* (London : Women's Press, 1996)

Peers, E. Allison, *Mother of Carmel: A Portrait of St. Teresa of Jesus* (London: S.C.M Press, 1945)

Peterson, Linda H., ‘Restoring the Book: The Typological Hermeneutics of Christina Rossetti and the PRB,’ *Victorian Poetry*, 37 (1994), 209-231

Prettejohn, Elizabeth, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Publishing, 2000)

Roden, Frederick S., ‘Sisterhood is Powerful: Christina Rossetti’s Maude’, in Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, eds., *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 63-77

Roe, Dinah, *Christina Rossetti’s Faithful Imagination: The Devotional Poetry and Prose* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Rooksby, Rikki, A.C. *Swinburne: A Poet’s Life* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997)

—, ‘Swinburne in Miniature: A Century of Roundels’, *Victorian Poetry*, 23 (1985), 249-265

Rosenblum, Dolores ‘Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence’, in Kent, ed., *The Achievement*, pp. 132-156

—, *Christina Rossetti: the Poetry of Endurance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986)

—, 'Christina Rossetti's Religious Poetry: Watching, Looking, Keeping Vigil,' *Victorian poetry*, 20 (1982), 33-49

Rowell, Geoffrey, 'Introduction: 1830-2001,' in Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson and Rowan Williams, eds., *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 369-376

Rowland, Christopher, *Radical Christianity: a reading of recovery* (Cambridge : Polity, 1988)

Scheinberg, Cynthia, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Schussler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)

Shaw, David W., *Victorians and Mystery: Crises of Representation* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1990)

—, 'Poetry and Religion,' in Cronin and others *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, pp. 457-474

Sheldrake, Philip, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian living and the doctrine of God* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1998)

Shelton Reed, John, *Glorious Battle: the cultural politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville; London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996)

Smulders, Sharon, 'Vocational Metaphors in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins,' *Victorian Poetry*, 29, (1991), 161-73

Stanford Friedman, Susan, *Mappings: feminism and the cultural geographies of encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998)

Stanhope, Elizabeth, 'Compromise rejected : a reading of Christina Rossetti's poetry which shows it to be born out of a continuing struggle to express and resolve contradiction' (unpublished M.Phil, University of Warwick, 1999)

Stewart, Stanley, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison, Milwaukee, & London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966)

Tennyson, G.B., *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*, (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1981)

Thomas, Jane, 'Introduction', in Thomas Hardy, *The Well Beloved with The Pursuit of the Well Beloved* (Wordsworth Classics, 2000)

Underhill, Evelyn, ed., Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. from ms. sources (London: John M. Watkins, 1923)

--- *Mysticism; a study in the nature and development of man's spiritual consciousness* (New York: Dutton, 1961)

--- *Worship* (James Nisbet & Company, 1936; repr. Guildford: Eagle, 1991)

VanEsvelde Adams, Kimberly, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: the Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001)

Vicinus, Martha, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1985)

W.K.L.C., 'Introduction,' in *Verses by Christina Rossetti* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1925)

Ward, Benedicta, 'A Tractarian Inheritance: The Religious Life in a Patristic Perspective' in Geoffrey Rowell, ed., *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986), pp. 214-225

Warner, Marina, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1976)

Warren, Raymond, 'Music and the Liturgy,' in David Jasper and R.C.D. Jasper, eds., *Language and the Worship of the Church* (London: Macmillan, 1989) pp. 196-211

Warwick, Alexandra, and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress, and the Body* (New York: Berg Press, 1998)

Weber, Alison, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, (Princeton, N.J; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1990)

Wheeler, Michael, *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Whitla, William, 'Questioning the Convention; Christina Rossetti's Sonnet Sequence "Monna Innominata,"' in Kent, ed., *The Achievement*, pp. 82-131

Williams, Rowan, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2005)

Williams, Thomas Jay, and Campbell, Allan Walter, *The Park Village Sisterhood* (London: S.P.C.K, 1965)

Wilson, Katharina M., ed. *Medieval women writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)



Wootton, Sarah, *Consuming Keats: Nineteenth Century Re-Presentations in Art and Literature*, (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Zemka, Sue, *The Bible, Christology, and Literary Authority in Early Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997)